

Syria: ALL the International Powers Want to Crush the Popular Uprising

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We are currently witnessing at different levels, politically and military, another attempt to put an end to the uprising in Syria. Military advances of the regime forces assisted by ground forces of Hezbollah and Shi'a sectarian militias directed by Iran and Russian airstrikes are occurring with the collaboration of Western imperialist powers, despite some rhetorical condemnations while Syrian opposition is pushed into diplomatic negotiations by these same international forces to basically kneel to the conditions of the Assad regime.

- Russian airstrikes are now leading to ground gains by Assad forces
- The Geneva talks were a failure and the U.S. blames the victims
- Our duty is to support the goals and forces of the democratic uprising

Military offensives throughout Syria of the regime forces backed by Russian airstrikes

For the past two weeks, Assad regime forces, Hezbollah and Shi'a sectarian militias directed by Iran, all backed by massive Russian bombing raids and using cluster munitions and vacuum missiles, have made unprecedented gains in the northern Aleppo countryside and encircled the liberated areas of Aleppo, which has been divided between regime and opposition control since autumn 2012. The advances of regime forces assisted by its allies broke the siege imposed by Jaysh al Fath, a coalition of armed forces dominated by Jabhat al Nusra and Ahrar Sham, on the Shi'a towns of Nubl and Zahraa. The result of these maneuvers is that the regime has cut off supply lines to the free areas of Aleppo city, which populated of around 350,000 civilians and isolated different armed groups opposed to the Assad regime in the northern countryside, while tens of thousands, of civilians, estimates goes as far as more than 50,000, are fleeing the forces of the regime and its allies were seeking refuge at the Bab al-Salama border crossing or also in the city of Afrin, which is under the control of the Kurdish force, the Democratic Union Party (PYD). At the same time massive destructions of civilian infrastructures occurred with Russian airstrikes, such as the bombing of the last major hospital, the Andan charitable hospital established in 2013, in a liberated areas of northern Aleppo.

Turkey has kept the Bab al-Salama crossing closed until today, while Turkish humanitarian groups sent in truckloads of aid for the tens of thousands of Syrians stranded on the border, but in

insufficient quantity according to various Syrian activists at the border.

Following the military offensive of the regime and its allies, armed opposition groups operating in the northern countryside of Aleppo proclaimed the formation of the “unified military council” . In the liberated areas of Aleppo, the local council has formed a crisis center to provide and preserve the essential needs of food and fuel at affordable prices. The council has spent most of its funds to secure fuel to support bakery furnaces, hospitals, civil defense groups and water pumps, but expressed doubts the available amount would be enough. Massive popular protests also occurred throughout districts under opposition control in the city of Aleppo demanding that the province’s armed factions to unite under the “Army of Aleppo” and for a free Syria.

At the same time in the past few days, tens of thousands of Daraa inhabitants are fleeing a combination of regime ground advances and aerial bombardments by Russian and regime forces, with one estimate of up to 80,000 people displaced. Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières) also reported on February 9 that one of their hospitals in the Daraa province, has been hit by a Russian airstrike. The elected opposition Daraa Provincial Council wrote in a statement published on February 7 about the “difficulty to find shelter for them” and adding that “the lack of food and medicine and closure of the Jordanian border has exacerbated the suffering.” This followed the seizure of the town of Ataman, 3 km north of Daraa city, last week securing a section of the old Daraa-Damascus highway and extending defensive lines for regime forces in the provincial capital. Before this, the strategic city of Sheikh Miskeen, around 75km south of Damascus and sits on a crossroads connecting Suwaida, Quneitra and Damascus provinces, was captured by regime forces. In both cases, Russian airstrikes were key in the advances of the Assad regime forces.

In the opposition-controlled areas in the Homs countryside, **regime aircraft dropped leaflets, threatening the use of new highly destructive weapons and claiming that residents would not be safe from harm inside their shelters.** The regime wants to spread and increase the state of fear among inhabitants as a result of the raids, in which Russian aircraft also participate. Russian warplanes carried out 50 air raids targeting the town of Telbeesa over two consecutive nights (February 8 and 9), causing a number of deaths and wide damage to local infrastructure. In rural Idlib province, on February 9, at least 15 people were killed by Russian air-bombing that hit a camp for internally-displaced-persons, IDPs, or internal refugees.

We have to remember that these new military gains by regime forces would have been impossible without the military assistance of Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and various Shi’a sectarian militias. The Syrian army has been weakened considerably, various estimation pointing out that its numbers fell from 300,000 to as little as between 60,000 and 80,000 and had suffered various important defeats before the summer 2015, notably after the fall of the northern towns of Idlib and nearby Jisr al-Shughour in May 2015 falling in the hands of the coalition of the Jaysh al-Fath, led by Jabhat Al Nusra and Ahrar Sham.

Desertions and lack of will from the Syrian youth to die for a corrupt and authoritarian regime explain mainly the impossibility of the regime’s army to recruit new soldiers. A lot of young men have actually been fleeing for Europe often after having received their call-up papers or being ordered to report for reserve duty. In the same time, the weakness of the regime’s army has led to the creation of a 125,000-strong locally based National Defence Force, which has been mostly trained and paid by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This is why opposing these foreign imperialist interventions, are so important, because without them the regime would not have been able to continue and deepen its war against the Syrian population.

Geneva III, Munich, etc... pushing the Syrians to kneel...

The Geneva III conference was another failure, as regime forces and its allies continued its military offensives on various areas of Syria controlled by opposition armed groups, pushing the High Negotiations Committee of the Syrian opposition to withdraw from the negotiation. UN special envoy, De Mistura set a new target date of February 25 to reconvene talks between the Syrian regime and opposition in Geneva.

In the meantime, the various imperialist powers met for the International Syria Support Group in Munich, Germany, on February 11, 2016 in a bid to revive "peace efforts". Trying to prevent a collapse of diplomatic efforts to pursue the "peace negotiations", U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry had pushed before this meeting for a ceasefire and more humanitarian aid access ahead of the meeting. Despite the formal agreement of Russian officials to Kerry's diplomatic efforts, Russia continued its airstrikes campaign from Aleppo up north to Deraa down south as we have seen above.

Regime officials have on their side made clear that they are unwilling to stop any military advances. Syrian Foreign Minister Waleed al-Muallem declared last weekend that there will be "no ceasefire until the Turkish border is secured," referring to Bab al-Salama, while Bouthaina Shaaban, senior adviser to dictator Assad, actually declared on February 9, that "there would be no let-up in the army advance, which aimed to recapture the city of Aleppo from various opposition armed forces and secure Syria's border with Turkey".

On their side, the High Negotiations Committee of the Syrian opposition declared their readiness as well to attend the talks in Germany in an attempt to revive Syria peace efforts. In the same time, the High Negotiations Committee urged U.S. President Barack Obama to do more to stop Russian bombing raids in Syria and to provide weaponry to able armed opposition groups to defend them.

The delivery of arms and weapons with no political conditions attached from the West or any state to democratic sections of the Free Syrian Army to fight and struggle against the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces have been a key demand of democratic and progressive section of supporters of the Syrian revolution without success.

The outcome of the Munich conference was that the international powers agreed on February 12 to a cessation of hostilities in Syria set to begin week after and to provide rapid humanitarian access to besieged Syrian towns, but they failed to secure a complete ceasefire or an end to Russian bombing. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared that Russia would not stop air attacks in Syria, saying the cessation of hostilities did not apply to Daech and Jabhat al Nusra. The Russian state propaganda has made similar declarations in the framework of the so called "war against terror" throughout its bombing campaigns in Syria that started on September 30, 2015 to justify its military intervention in the country on the side of the Assad regime, but as we have shown in this article and in the previous one [\[1\]](#) the targets are mostly not Daech and Jabhat al Nusra, but FSA groups and other Islamist forces as well as civilians and civilians infrastructure. As a reminder, on January 20, 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights announced that Russian airstrikes, which started on 30 September 2015, have killed 1,015 civilians, including more than 200 children, while hundreds of thousands of civilians had to flee their areas because of the Russian airstrikes, in addition to the destruction of neighborhoods, hospitals, schools, etc...

The major powers also reaffirmed their commitment to a political transition when conditions on the ground improved... Moreover than ever we can see that regime change is not in the agenda of the various international imperialist powers in Syria, quite on the opposite as we said before.

Conclusion

The objectives of the Russian military intervention and massive airstrikes campaigns were clear since September 30, 2015: save and consolidate the political and military power of the Assad regime. Russian President Vladimir Putin actually said on September 28, before the beginning of the Russian airstrikes: "There is no other way to settle the Syrian conflict other than by strengthening the existing legitimate government agencies, support them in their fight against terrorism". In other words crush all forms of opposition, whether democratic or reactionary, to the Assad regime under the so called "war on terror". All authoritarian regimes have used this same kind of propaganda to repress popular movements and/ or opposition groups to their powers: Assad against the popular movement since day 1 of the popular uprising, Sissi in Egypt to repress particularly the Muslim Brotherhoods, but also progressive left and democratic movements, Erdogan against the PKK and various leftist movements, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia against the protesters and popular movements challenging their power, etc...

This also has severe consequences on civilians as we saw above.

Is the USA not aware of the objectives of the Russian state? It is hardly believable that they were not, on the opposite they probably saw it as an opportunity to pressure the opposition to negotiate with the Assad regime, as actually occurred these past few weeks and still is. US Secretary of State John Kerry actually told Syrian aid workers on the sidelines of the 'Supporting Syria' donor conference in London that Syrian 'opposition will be decimated' and to expect 3 months of bombing. Kerry actually blamed the Syrian opposition for leaving the talks in Geneva III conference and paving the way for a joint offensive by the Syrian regime and Russia on Aleppo. This behaviour should not be seen as a surprise or a treason of the USA as some have put it. This would indeed have meant that Washington had had even for a second a political will for regime change in Syria, which was never the case as I showed in a previous article in peacenews. [2]

Despite their rivalry, imperialist and sub imperialist interventions share a common purpose today: to liquidate the revolutionary popular movement initiated in March 2011, stabilize the regime in Damascus in keeping at the head its criminal dictator (for a short and medium term at least), and try to militarily defeat Daech. For example, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir declared on February 8 that Riyadh held out the possibility of sending Saudi special forces into Syria as part of a U.S.-led coalition against Daech. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain also joined the movement saying its willingness to send troops to train and support a U.S.-led coalition against Daech, while Kuwait said it supported the alliance against Daech but that it would not send troops. **At the same time, the King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, welcomed and offered Russian president Putin a damascene sword** and told him that they called it the sword of victory, and victory will be your ally... Russian Presidential Aide announced on February 10 that Saudi Arabia's King Salman is scheduled to visit Russia in mid-March.

We must not imagine that the imperialist rivalries at the global level between the United States, China and Russia would be insurmountable for these powers, to the extent that these powers are in reality in relations of interdependence on many issues. All these regimes are bourgeois regimes that are and always will be the enemies of the popular revolutions, seeking to impose or strengthen a stable political context allowing them to accumulate and develop their political and economic capital in defiance of the popular classes. It does not matter that the detainees held by the Syrian regime are being killed on a massive scale amounting to a state policy of "extermination" of the civilian population, a crime against humanity, United Nations investigators declared few days ago. [3]

No regional or international power is a friend of the Syrian revolution as we have shown repeatedly.

In this framework, the United Nations acts as an institution at the service of these various imperialist powers. Russian Revolutionary Leon Trotsky's described the UN ancestor the League of Nations the following way: "The League in its defence of the status quo is not an organization of 'peace', but an organization of the violence of the imperialist minority over the overwhelming majority of mankind". This perfectly applies today to the United Nations and De Mistura's plan of so called "peace negotiation" for Syria, as the previous one. This was also witnessed in the UN silence for months on the blockade of the city of Madaya which started as early as end of June / beginning of July 2015 and key aspects of the blockade for months, or the statement of Carla Del Ponte, current member of the UN commission of enquiry on Syria, declaring that generally speaking the Russian intervention in Syria was positive, because it attacked terrorist groups such as Daesh and Al Qaeda, while adding that there was nevertheless still a small problem: the lack of distinction of Russian airstrikes between civilians and terrorist groups.

The role of the progressive forces is to oppose and condemn all the imperialist schemes to put an end to the Syrian popular uprising, condemn the continuous war of the Assad criminal regime against the population of Syria and the assistance given by foreign forces of Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and various other Shi'a sectarian militias in this murderous campaign. The intervention of these foreign powers and groups resulted in new and increasing civilian casualties and suffering. In the same time, even though less important, we also oppose the interventions of Gulf monarchies and Turkey in the past, which were to advance their own selfish political interests and not the ones of the Syrian people and to change the nature of the revolution into a sectarian war or increasing sectarian animosities, following a similar behaviour therefore of the Assad regime and its allies.

We have to support today crucial demands of the Syrian people, which are peace, the end of the war, end of the bombings, end of blockades, the release of political prisoners and the return of refugees and internal displaced populations, while in the same time maintaining the initial objectives of the revolution in our struggle: freedom, social justice, equality and no to sectarianism and to racism.

We can still find examples of pockets of hope within Syria supporting these initial objectives. The town of Zamalka, in rural Damascus, witnessed new experiences of local democracy with the election by the inhabitants of a new local council. The popular organisation "The Day After" (TDA)'s launched in the past few weeks a Women Empowerment campaign inside Douma, focusing on women's participation and leadership in Syrian society and the challenges they face, including the effects of siege and war on their life and their ability to work. Another campaign of TDA called "Complain so that you don't lose your rights," was led in Daraa, in which TDA activists put 'complaints box in streets' to encourage citizens to express any concerns they may have about armed groups in their areas, and initiate action and dialogue to improve interactions between civilians and armed group members. The campaign has previously been launched in Idlib and Douma. Sit ins in Douma, Kafranbel and Saraqeb in solidarity with Kurdish people with slogans such as "From Douma to 'Amouda Peace (Salutation) and respect" and "The Kurds are a part of the Syrian Revolution" and to reactivate the civil popular movement; the Saraqeb Youth gathering in the Idlib Governorate launched a campaign to promote respect for basic freedom of expression called "that's your opinion", but had to stop after threats from the local armed groups.

We need to support these pockets of hope and the popular (armed and civilian) resistance still existing in Syria and composed of various democratic and progressive groups and movements opposing all sides of the counter-revolution, the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist groups.

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P.S.

* “ALL the International Powers Want to Crush the Syrian Uprising”. Posted on February 12, 2016: <http://peacenews.org/2016/02/12/all-the-international-powers-want-to-crush-the-syrian-uprising-joseph-daher/>

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Footnotes

[1] See available on ESSF (article 37165), [Understanding Syria's Revolution - The popular political and socio-economic dynamics at the bottom should not be overlooked](#).

[2] Op. cit.

[3] http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A-HRC-31-CRP1_en.pdf