

Aleppo: Assad's barbarism - "Much of the left in Britain did not go beyond opposing what it described as its main enemy, which is its own government"

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Fred Leplat writes about the barbarism unleashed by Assad on the people of eastern Aleppo.



London demonstration in solidarity with Aleppo, 17 December (photo: Steve Eason)

Bashar al-Assad is in the last stages of the military annihilation of eastern Aleppo. It is no liberation but the culmination of a barbarism reminiscent of a medieval siege. Over the last 4 years, there has been relentless and indiscriminate bombardment of civilians, the targeted destruction of medical facilities throughout Syria and the slow starvation of eastern Aleppo's 300,000 strong population.

This barbarism is nothing new. Assad has brutally repressed the uprising for democracy since its eruption in 2011 alongside similar movements in the region. The war unleashed by Assad on a country of 18 million has led to over 470,000 deaths, 7.6 million internally displaced and 4.8 million refugees.

Assad's regime is one of the most tyrannical in the region. His father, Hafez al-Assad, brutally repressed an uprising in Hama in 1982, killing over 25,000.

Assad has justified the military onslaught by describing all opposition as terrorists and supporters of ISIS/Daesh. The reports by citizen journalists from inside Aleppo of the White Helmets, the medical staff, education workers, and civil society demonstrate that this is a cynical lie.

Daesh was in fact expelled from east Aleppo months before the regime and their allies focused their brutality on retaking it. Joseph Daher explained it like this in May 2016: *"Aleppo represents a powerful symbol of a democratic popular opposition, which first opposed and pushed out the Assad regime, and then drove away Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra, opposing their authoritarian and reactionary practices. There are only Free Syrian Army groups and Islamist oriented armed factions in these neighbourhoods. The liberated areas of Aleppo, where 300,000 people still live, are self-organized by the local population through local popular councils that manage all sectors of society in the administration of schools, waste management, provision of food and first necessary products,*

democratic campaigns, cultural events, psychological assistance to civilians, etc.”

The survivors of the siege of east Aleppo now face the gauntlet of the Syrian army and its allies of Hezbollah and the Iranian forces as they make their way to the squalor of refugee camps.

This is not the end of the war. The Assad regime can only survive with the backing of Russia, Iran and Hezbollah. ISIS/Daesh has not been crushed – indeed they retook Palmyra recently.

There are still huge areas of the country still under the control of non-fundamentalist opposition forces such as the FSA and the Kurdish PYD. As recently as 16 December there were massive demonstrations in many Syrian cities in solidarity with the people of Aleppo

The plight and the suffering of civilians in Syria opposed to the twin barbarism of Assad and ISIS/Daesh could have been avoided.

The West, in particular the US, did not want a victory of the democratic movement. It argued the regime should stay in place, albeit without Assad. For them, better a loyal but brutal dictatorship serving its interests, than a democratic and popular government charting an independent course.

Iran needs to prop up its regional allies of Hezbollah and Bashar al-Assad. Russia needs to maintain its military bases at Tartus and Latakia. Turkey’s main goal is to contain and defeat the PYD and the Kurdish liberated areas such as Rojava along its border with Syria. Some in the Gulf states were indirectly supporting ISIS/Daesh for religious sectarian motivations. It is cynical for British politicians to condemn Assad while selling arms to Saudi Arabia, which has conducted an equally barbaric war on civilians in Yemen.

The voices of solidarity with the Syrians fighting for democracy and opposing all foreign intervention have been few. Some did condemn the Russian bombing in autumn of 2015. But foreign intervention in the war did not begin with the Russian air raids. Russia and Iran have been logistically supporting the Assad regime since the uprising in 2011.

Much of the left in Britain did not go beyond opposing what it described as its main enemy, which is its own government. This left the democrats in Syria to be literally defenseless. Stopping another British military imperialist intervention in Syria is absolutely necessary, but not sufficient. It also is necessary to support those opposing the twin barbarism of Assad and ISIS/Daesh who need the weapons to defend themselves with anti-aircraft weapons and to receive humanitarian aid.

There are still many Syrians in the country and outside that are committed to the original aspirations of the uprising for democracy in 2011. Many of them may not be socialists, or share our conception of socialism, but it is nevertheless our responsibility to be in solidarity with them and to promote their voices.

Peace must be restored to allow the people of Syria to live again. But without the removal of the dictator Assad and his brutal regime there will be no peace and justice for the people of Syria. But without an agreement for Assad to step down and allow a transition toward a pluralist government, no cease-fire stands a chance.

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P.S.

* Socialist Resistance. December 20, 2016:

<http://socialistresistance.org/aleppo-assads-barbarism/9423>