

# **On the Syrian Revolution**

**A Perspective from Korydallos Prison, Greece**

Korydallos Anarchist Initiative

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*AntiNote: This astonishing testimony and analysis is well over a year old at the time of our posting it. Documents of this nature tend to circulate slowly; we beg your patience and understanding. It is also quite long, so we will not detain you here with excessive qualifications, although we do wish to draw your attention to all the observations within it, large and small, that have been further borne out and confirmed in the time since its writing, as well as to the ongoing and somehow still worsening plight of revolutionary Syrians inside and outside their former country.*

*Take your time with this, take it for what it is, take it seriously, and ask yourself: how is it that so many free people on the Western left, when it comes to Syria, have fallen for mendacious fascist narratives and the comfort of flat, facile analysis that is so obviously inferior to the understanding developed by these Greek anarchists who have been living behind bars and suffering all the corresponding deprivations of incarceration?*

*With solidarity, love, and rage from the north woods of Turtle Island to the heart of Europe to a Mediterranean prison to every free Syrian still drawing breath from Dera'a to Idlib and everywhere in between.*

*Save the rest! Fascism is death—death to fascism! Freedom to the people!  
—Antidote Writers Collective, July 2018*

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The recent developments in Syria—or, more accurately, the geographical area that used to be the Syrian state until 2011—constitute the most complex link in a chain of revolutions that started to take place in the Arab world towards the end of 2010.

The uprising against an autocratic regime, the uncompleted revolution of the local committees, the genocidal involvement of the US and Russia, the chaotic war against everyone, the emergence of ISIS, the special case of the Kurdish communities of Rojava, the hundreds of thousands of deaths and the millions of refugees, and the total war—as well as seemingly incongruent alliances and a lot more aspects—are all pieces of a puzzle that reflects a battlefield of geopolitical competition among the global dominant powers of our time.

Since such events write modern world history, all revolutionary movements need to process the information available, discuss and come to conclusions, and eventually choose sides and fight—without failing to take the context of this historical reality into account.

This text does not set out to provide an exhaustive historical narrative. Yet it does set out to open a discussion that will look into all the critical issues raised. Also, our aim is to turn our ideas into action—thus we choose to go against the widespread inertia that surrounds the subject matter.

A historical period like the one we are in requires much more than a mere theoretical analysis. As the hotbed of war keeps spreading and is now reaching Europe, it is urgent that we create an antiwar movement which will fight for and demand an end to international military interventions, put forward ideas of horizontal self-organization, empower the oppressed, and ultimately stand up against the rise of totalitarianism.

We know well that we can achieve nothing, and nothing will be spared for us, unless we fight at all levels and in all directions in order to intensify and expand our horizontal, grassroots self-organization.

For the war against state and capitalism!  
—from Korydallos prison, November 2016

## I. Introduction

The uprising in Syria, following that in Bahrain (which was drowned in blood by Saudi Arabia), was the last link in a chain of uprisings starting in the area of the Maghreb between 2011 and 2013. The Western mainstream media called this series of uprisings the “Arab Spring,” implying that the demand of the revolted populations was the replacement of their political systems with a regime of representative republicanism, namely Western-type democracy.

However, there are further decisive contributory factors underlying these uprisings. First there is the international neoliberal agenda promoted by state governments which serve the corporate interests of chiefly Western, Russian, Chinese, and Arab economic elites. Actually, the privatizations launched by states triggered escalating popular dissatisfaction in the region as large parts of the population were turning poorer and poorer. Second there is the violence that even the most peaceful demonstrations were treated with. Well before the spark (set by Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation) spread from Tunisia to Syria, demonstrations had come with death tolls for protesters. Moreover, the structural similarities among these regimes, the similar social stratification of their populations, as well as the shared characteristics of the human geography in the wider region, together constitute yet another factor that played a major role in the spread of the uprisings from Tunisia to Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. Finally, it’s worth noting that the fast speed with which these regimes were overthrown solidified the protesters’ conviction that dictators were, in reality, not at all untouchable.

Although all these factors co-existed in Syria, the situation evolved differently. For the moment, the geopolitical situation in Syria is a global puzzle without a solution. All the imperialist rulers—global or regional—are caught in a vicious circle of conflicts, opportunistic alliances, and unclear strategic goals as part of their presence in the area. The situation seems to have reached a dead end, but meanwhile the blood keeps flowing.

What has been going on for roughly four years now in Syria—meaning since the early spontaneous uprising began to weaken and gave way to hostilities among various competing parties—indicates that the interference and direct intervention of the global powers and their agents has expanded the battlefield, and with it the market and economy of war.

The rifts in society are too deep and nobody can lead the situation out of this chaos. So-called “negotiations” and “peace agreements” are nothing but plans on paper as long as they can’t generate binding solutions. It’s not possible for Syria to go back to its pre-war/uprising state. While the negotiators (the Syrian government, unsolicited opposition representatives, the US, Turkey, Russia) insist on drawing transitional plans that let Assad remain in power, a great number of opponents are by no means willing to conform.

A closer look at the course of events will allow us to understand how the situation evolved to this stalemate as we know it. The initial protests in March 2011, which demanded reforms rather than a change of regime, flared up in all big cities, and Assad’s security forces responded with excessive violence, killing dozens of protesters, torturing and orchestrating the disappearance of hundreds. As a result, lots of people took a more radical stance and demanded the fall of the regime.

Governmental authorities abandoned several cities, and self-organization emerged as the prime coordinator of everyday life: healthcare, water supply infrastructure, and other basic services were created in villages and neighborhoods. Unfortunately, the same thing did not happen in the field of self-defense, and this was a detriment to the preservation of the initial

character of the uprising. Part of the army, including generals and commanders with their forces, joined the anti-regime side and shortly later formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA). At that moment, the involvement of international powers became apparent. The Western powers (the US, the EU, NATO, etc.) armed the anti-regime nuclei while the Russian state armed Assad's allies. During the same period, the Kurdish areas of northern Syria were the poorest in the whole country and predominately controlled by the PYD (a party affiliated with the PKK); the PYD followed a model of communal management in the economy and social life in the areas under its control.

Under social pressure, Assad gave amnesty to many political prisoners, and this event complicated the situation even further. Lots of the released political prisoners were Kurdish and Muslim fundamentalists. The latter broke away from Iraq-based al-Qaeda and eventually formed ISIS, which proclaimed a territorial establishment for Salafism. The totalitarian monarchies in the Gulf (especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar) supported the fundamentalists with lots of money and equipment in order to increase their manipulative influence in the region. This support strengthened ISIS as well as al-Nusra, which is yet another al-Qaeda offshoot in Syria that took a dominant role inside the opposition compared to the (undermined and poorly equipped by the Western bloc) FSA.

The expansion of ISIS westward throughout 2014 met no obstacles. Neither the Western powers nor Russia immediately considered the presence of ISIS a threat to their interests. Only after the heroic and determined fight of the Kurds and international fighters against ISIS in Kobanê did the American and Russian states understand that the empowerment of the Kurds could possibly serve their interests in that area. This development did not satisfy the Turkish state, which has long had its own reasons to oppose Kurdish self-determination, mainly because of the attitude of their US allies. Using the "War on Terror" as a pretext, the Turkish state first attacked the Kurdish-populated areas of southeastern Turkey and later the Kurdish cantons in Syria. By mid-2015, Assad's regime had lost control of many territories and was chiefly established in the capital and a few adjacent areas to the west. Russia's decisive air force intervention prevented a further contraction of the regime and enabled it to re-occupy some regions.

Today—long after the initial uprising and revolution that turned into a bloodbath—we stand in the middle of a chaotic war. It's obvious that any geostrategic guesstimate is risky. On the one hand, sociopolitical stability seems to be of importance to international economic trade. On the other hand, instability and destruction of infrastructure also appears to facilitate the economic interests of certain power blocs. Such rearrangements intensified the conflict, orchestrated by transnational alliances and their agents. The "war economy" is integral to global capitalism that these power blocs promote.

Initially, the US armed the FSA only enough merely to defend against but not defeat government troops. Similarly, the Russian state overtly intervened on behalf of Assad's allies—this intervention, though, was not timely enough to help him prevail. Instead, it reached him when he had nearly collapsed.

Weapons, telecommunications, food, and fuel markets are large markets that can maximize their profit margins during wartime. Trade—legitimate and not, mainly of petrol—between the opposing sides may seem contradictory at first glance, but this is how war works in the era of advanced capitalism. Another major hindrance to stability is the fact that most of the belligerents do not respect the agreements of the dominant powers and continue a war in conditions of full extremity.

Self-evidently, the war could have ended in the absence of all these intricacies.

## II. The Revolution

For a better understanding of the evolution of the Syrian revolution beyond the period of its initial outbreak (a.k.a. the Arab Spring), we shall examine the era of the early twentieth century. The once-great Ottoman empire was in a state of disintegration and the ancestors of the modern imperialist powers, mainly English and French colonists, had divided the Middle East into zones of interest, exhibiting an absolute disregard for the people since their prime interest was directed towards the economic specificities of the area. Then came the establishment of protectorate states, the features of which related to the interests of either England or France. So, in the mid-twentieth century and after the end of the Second World War, at a time when the borders of the state of Israel were being arbitrarily marked in the heart of the Middle East, some states in the area, such as Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, fought for and gained their independence. Such states—characterized by arbitrary borders, limited social cohesion, and huge (mainly racial) differences—are outcomes of the ruthless actions of the European imperialists of past decades.

Syria is a country of huge inequalities. While seventy-five percent of the population consists of Sunni Muslims who have been arbitrarily divided from the Sunnis of northern Iraq, the coastline of Syria—the most fertile and rich land—is inhabited by a strong minority of Alawites and Shiites. Over the last forty-five years, these minorities monopolized power via Assad and his son's regime, which perpetuated, among other things, tensions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. It is important to note that this doesn't necessarily mean all Alawites belong to the highest classes of social stratification.

Concerning Assad's family, they came to power through Hafez al-Assad's military takeover in 1970. He and the current dictator, Bashar al-Assad, governed with an iron grip and built a brutal dictatorship. Even the minor relative freedoms of civil democracy were curtailed. Political life on the whole was totally and strictly controlled by the one and only legal political party, the Ba'ath Party, and its allies. Trade unions, social groups, and all organized groups were controlled by the regime. Thousands of political prisoners, activists, and dissidents were thrown into brutal regime prisons. This bloodstained regime applied a policy that perpetuated long-lasting divisive conflicts and controversies.

Even though Hafez ruled with an iron grip, he applied a "pro-grassroots" economic policy and thus ensured a pretty decent standard of living for a significant part of the population. Some years before the outbreak of the uprising, however, his son Bashar al-Assad began to implement a series of neoliberal reforms, following the economic doctrine of the IMF. This shift broke any bonds between the regime and the social body. These reforms marked a clear division. On the one end stood a capitalistic elite, including most of members of the Assad family, who gained ownership of the telecommunications sector as well as nearly all the wealth of the country, in no time. On the other end stood mass unemployment, impoverishment of the population, and, generally, the deepening of class differences.

These very contradictions came to the forefront in the overall spirit of the Arab Spring, and had become the initial incentive for the Syrian uprising well before it was presented solely as a revolution against Assad's oppressive dictatorship. It's important to emphasize the fact that the spirit of the Arab Spring played a major role in the beginning, especially during the initial stages

of the uprising. Mohamed Bouazizi, a street fruit seller, set himself on fire, triggering heroic riots in a number of countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria. Even though the cases might appear as unrelated—at least from an “international competition” point of view—there is a crucial factor that unites them all. For decades, they had all been governed by dictators whose neoliberal policies brought about poverty and social exclusion for the wider population.

A final but equally important factor in the area is the military operations in a series of countries in the Middle East conducted mainly (but not only) by Western imperialist powers. The invasion by Soviet troops of Afghanistan in 1979, the brazen help from the US to fundamentalists there, the “humanitarian” invasions by the American state and NATO in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 1991 and 2003—they have all slaughtered and forcibly relocated the populations of these areas, trapping them in a vicious cycle of violence while serving the interests of states and economic elites. The genocide of populations in this area orchestrated by the West, in combination with the Nazi policy implemented by Israel, has led a large part of Arab society to favor Islamic fundamentalism. As a result, organized Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda or ISIS are the only true disputants of the occupiers’ armies and the slavish regimes in the eyes of these populations. In this way, the peoples’ uprisings that demanded freedom and rights were turned into a war for the promotion of intolerant ideas.

### **First phase: the outbreak of the revolutionary**

Under the circumstances described above, the spirit of the Arab Spring arrived in the long-suffering area of Syria in mid-March 2011, triggering a heroic outbreak of uprisings that turned into a revolution—a revolution which, unfortunately, has since mutated into a prolonged civil war and become a place of experiments by global imperialist powers. The arrest and humiliation of a man accused of a traffic offense as well as the arrest of youngsters for anti-regime graffiti sparked the first mass demonstrations.

The initial demonstrations were totally spontaneous and without discrete political demands. Among the organizers were clerics and leftist artists whose goal, besides their innate will to oppose the regime, was not exactly to overthrow it but to reform it. This, of course, changed quickly after the peaceful demonstrations were suppressed by means of violence, bullets, and blood. The suppression of the demonstrations (for example the massacres of April 18 and 19 in Homs, where twenty-one demonstrators were murdered, or the siege in Dera’a, where dozens of people were killed between April 25 and May 5, 2011), together with the people’s will, acted as catalysts for the irreversibility of the situation.

The demonstrators were growing in number; they demanded freedom and the fall of the dictatorship. Of course, this development in turn made Assad’s attitude harsher. The even bigger protests had to be faced with the army’s bullets and storming by regime mercenaries in uniform as well as with murders carried out by informal groups allied to Assad known as the *shabiha*. The numbers of murdered, injured, and arrested were increasing exponentially, but at the same time the protesters’ tenacity was becoming stronger. Despite the massacres, they continued meeting in the streets, they continued fighting, they continued giving their blood to win the fight against the regime.

Under these circumstances, the first self-organized initiatives made their appearance. Due to the large participation in the uprising, the regime’s forces departed from whole neighborhoods and even from large parts of entire cities. Therefore, self-organization wasn’t a mere political

procedure but instead a response from below to the total absence of the state and its structures in these areas. This spontaneous self-organization was so promising for the revolutionary movements that it touched all areas of social life.

An important factor for this development was the extremely difficult situation people from these areas found themselves in, and that's what deepened social solidarity. Collective management of food and housing, homes turning into self-organized hospitals and schools, self-organized media, rescue teams, electricity, and water supply were some of the examples—concrete examples, indicating that people can self-organize beyond states, political parties, and trade unions.

This initial people's movement was stimulated and politically guided by the vision of the anarchist Omar Aziz (this fact may come as a surprise to all those who shortsightedly choose to interpret the events only at a state-against-state level, ignoring class-based analysis and thus becoming apologists for totalitarian regimes). Some months after the outbreak of the uprising, the anarchist Omar Aziz (who eventually died inside a regime prison in 2013) put forward the idea of local committees, which spread over a large territory of Syria in the following months, before being destroyed by regime forces or reactionary opposition entities. His inspiration was an important political contribution that is not simply a tale from the past. Rather, it remains alive up to today in the dissident regions of Syria, such as Aleppo, Dera'a, and Idlib, where people continue to organize social life under the sounds of bombs and the grind of deprivation, and they demonstrate not only against the regime but also the corrupted leaders of the armed opposition.

The core principle of this endeavor was to manage all sectors of life in a self-organized way, without people having to subject themselves to any kinds of power structures. Unfortunately, though, at a crucial point in the conflict—that is, when the violence was escalating, especially from the regime side—the self-defense of these grassroots committees hadn't progressed sufficiently.

The decades of Assad's junta in Syria resulted in the absence of organized political structures that would have been able—right from the outset and before suppression stifled spontaneity—not only to articulate overall demands, but also to strengthen and protect the emergent revolutionary movement from both the regime's gangs (with and without uniforms) as well as the revolution's dearest enemy, radical Islamist groups. As mentioned earlier, what triggered the revolution were the neoliberal reforms of the regime. It is important to keep in mind that when the uprising broke out in Syria, people's movements had overthrown dictators who had ruled for many years already, like Ben Ali in Tunisia or Mubarak in Egypt. Syrian people may have expected the fall of Assad's regime to be easier and faster. Unfortunately, they had underestimated the bloodthirsty crook they had as president, and also downplayed the interests of global and regional players such as the US, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.

Moreover, it is important to mention that in the two largest cities of Syria, namely the capital Damascus and industrial Aleppo, the uprising took longer to make its appearance. This gave the regime a chance to avoid further battlefields and keep its economic and political power unscathed to a remarkable extent. As we see it, especially regarding the case of the capital, Damascus, the fact that it wasn't occupied by anti-regime powers meant a victory for the regime and a loss for the rebels in both symbolic as well as material terms. Chiefly in the beginning, when the situation was still volatile and the global allies hadn't yet interfered, if mass demonstrations had taken place immediately in Damascus, Assad could have been overthrown.



## **Second phase: Militarization**

Even though the Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs) were at the peak of their political strength, they were unable to cope with armed struggle due to the scarcity of ammunition and military experience. The one and only horizontal structure couldn't trust itself in the clash against the regime when the latter revealed its bloody face by riddling whole demonstrations with bullets and eventually tank shells (with the worst yet to come).

This lack of armed communities emerging from the heart of the revolution created the first rift. Right or wrong, the power of those involved in a revolution or war is analogous to the weapons they have. From the moment the regime intensified the clashes, armed groups were bound to play a pivotal role in the development of the struggle. Actually, at this point there is a crucial difference between our opinion and that of those who largely criticize the revolution's militarization. For us, depending on the enemy you oppose, there comes a point when you have to fight. At this crucial point, the lack of a revolutionary organization—which could, on the one hand, win a battle and, on the other, spread the practice of self-organization in the body of the revolutionaries—becomes apparent. The competing monarchies of the Gulf and the fascist state of Turkey took advantage of this very lack of structure by strengthening and arming every group that could possibly serve their interests better. This move increased the conflicts in an area that had simmered for years. For Westerners who simply run at the first taste of tear gas at a demonstration, it is easy to blame the people of the Middle East, and Syria in particular, for “blindly following” radical Islamist groups. We choose to see beyond whichever political purity test is *en vogue* and evaluate affairs in a broader scope.

When people suffer from hunger, when a regime commits murder, when bullets are a little too close for comfort during demonstrations, most people won't focus on political ideas or imperatives but instead their ability to provide safety and the capacity to confront the armed opponent on equal terms. In Syria's case, when the revolutionary movement was in its initial stages, this need was covered first by secular groups of the FSA and later by the fundamentalists of al-Nusra and others. We have to understand that apart from the predictable reaction of the global imperialists to intervene and deflect every revolutionary attempt anywhere in the world, the outcome also depends on whichever weakness the local revolutionary movement has, and, by extension, the global solidarity that revolutionaries from foreign countries will show.

An important factor that restrained the revolution and paved the way for radical Islam to interfere was the people's consequent defeatism as they saw Assad remain in power and intensify the violence. As we mentioned above, due to the Tunisian and Egyptian experiences, Syrian people may have thought that, despite the strong repression, Assad's fall would come sooner rather than later. So when this did not happen (for reasons we will explain later on), negative feelings and long-lived hatreds came to the surface. People either began to back out from revolutionary attempts and massively leave the country, or searched for saviors to drag them out of the bad situation. Once more, the lack of an organized political counter-proposal acted as a catalyst for the way the situation evolved.

## **The FSA**

For starters, we can say that, unlike other aspects, the part of military equipment and self-defense of the revolutionary communities didn't work in a self-organized way. Members of the army

defected and created a military movement which later turned into the Free Syrian Army and came to fill this vacuum. Despite the impression its name might make, this organization consists of—more or less—over 1,500 small groups of people whose political views and origins are so different that they often fight against one another. The FSA was created after the massacres in Dera'a and Homs, where the soldiers took orders to shoot at demonstrators. Whoever did not obey the order was executed. Under these circumstances lots of soldiers and former generals of Assad's army joined the FSA. Some did so because they didn't want to take part in the murders, while others saw the regime's fall coming and wanted to benefit from the new situation.

Since people who wanted to resist couldn't self-organize their defense the way they did with other aspects of life, they joined this blend of groups, which were managed (in any way possible) by some former generals of Assad. In any case, entities created during a revolution have no particular political premises or ideological basis whatsoever. This has both positive and negative implications, which we will discuss below. Due to the chaotic internal situation, all kinds of people—from democrats to radical Islamists and apolitical thugs—joined the FSA. These people are responsible for atrocities committed later, as there was no central control capable of restraining them.

These groups were politically “represented” by an unsolicited, exiled political structure called the Syrian National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution. Some of them turned to the US and Turkey for support, and, eventually, accepted military equipment and in some cases even training from the US in order to meet the demands of the war. As for the US, they didn't give help to all groups. Those deemed qualified to receive support were those who were controllable enough to ensure the enhancement of the US's negotiating role in the area—or perhaps those who were also aiming at establishing a state of war in the form of strategic tension—but, surely, the incentive behind this support was neither to help these groups defeat Assad nor to back rulers inside the opposition.

In Turkey's case, their aid had a large impact on the unity of the revolution, as it allowed the Turkish state to increase its influence on the choices made by the leadership of the opposition. The attitude of the National Coalition towards the Kurdish affair is a characteristic example of this kind. Its leadership was controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood and played a very nasty role in trying to come to an agreement with Assad several times. Stories of their corruption didn't inspire trust in their base, which questioned them and prevented these nasty agreements from being put into practice.

## **Independent brigades**

It is important to mention that independent brigades have existed in Syria's opposition since the first moment. They haven't participated in the central management of the FSA even though they may have been branded with this label. Lacking the support of any big power, given that they were not controllable, most of them didn't gain enough power to determine the development of the revolutionary struggle. These independent brigades would express a varied spectrum of political ideologies, ranging from radical Islamic conservatism to leftist views and ideas (for example, the Leon Sedov Brigade or the People's Liberation Faction).

## **Al-Nusra**

At the same time, al-Nusra made its appearance as an offshoot of al-Qaeda, and—being adequately armed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar to outgun the FSA in military terms—dominated and attracted lots of fighters, radicalizing the revolution towards the direction of Islam. Assad himself took care of their empowerment for this purpose, by letting out of prison hundreds of radical Islamists, who nowadays also man the leadership of the Islamic State. We don't know if he just gave in to pressure in an attempt to tamp down the revolution or if he did it deliberately, aiming at a long-term strategy of dissolution of meanings and the concomitant isolation of the revolution. At any rate, it was in this way that the conditions for the creation of ISIS were set.

## **The Islamic State**

While al-Nusra along with more moderate armed groups with fundamentalist orientations allied with the FSA in a bourgeois-democratic political frame, ISIS put into practice Islamic (*sharia*) law right away and went on to gravely undermine women's position in society and legitimize forms of violence like whippings, decapitations, and crucifixions in the streets. Since al-Nusra preferred to appear moderate, they condemned these practices, criticizing them as premature. As a matter of fact, al-Nusra claims that people must be trained in sharia before it can be put into practice. Nevertheless, in the already religious society of Syria, these groups found resonance and room to grow due to Assad's oppression and assaults.

Almost immediately upon its formation, ISIS occupied a large part of Syrian territory, attacked anti-regime forces it couldn't control, attacked Kurdish areas, pursued ethnic cleansing, backed the trafficking of women and others as slaves, and profited off trade in petroleum. In Aleppo and other places which were under opposition control, ISIS's headquarters were destroyed by FSA attacks. It doesn't come as a surprise that people who suffered mass killings found saviors in the faces of jihadists, overlooking the latter's intention to establish an even more authoritarian form of oppression. However, a large part of the population in cities occupied by ISIS continued to demonstrate both against Assad and ISIS and the brutal policies of both. As a result, the Islamic caliphate treated demonstrators with extremely harsh oppression.

## **The communities of Rojava**

Meanwhile, in the north of Syria we find the Kurdish PYD, who regarded the revolutionary conditions as beneficial to their endeavors. Taking advantage of the power vacuum, they used their military forces, namely the YPG and YPJ (the latter is the well-known women's force), to take over certain territories. This guerrilla army is based in the mountains of Kurdistan, as are a number of other clandestine Kurdish organizations. They veiled their actions in a reformist disguise, laying the foundations for the creation of Rojava under the shadow of Assad's regime. On the lands they occupied, self-organization found space to grow as people attempted to substitute the state's social structure that had collapsed. The same happened in the rest of Syria, where people from below organized themselves in all realms of social life, from production to self-defense, since attacks by ISIS created the need. That's how the cantons of Rojava were created. Since the beginning, the YPG/J have confronted ISIS and freed areas from its tyranny.

In these areas emerged a new social reality in which the state's institutions gave way to new federal democratic structures based on people's cooperation and self-organization. At the same

time, women acquired an outstanding role in social life and participate actively in battles while revolutionaries from all over the world arrive to support the Kurdish battle against ISIS.

Of course, we can't refer to these developments as a communist or anarchist revolution since the economic inequality wasn't dealt with—although steps were taken in this direction as a grass-roots, self-managed economy established itself at the bottom of the social pyramid. This economy coexisted with the conventional trade system led by a few capitalistic businesses, while social structures have yet to shed their hierarchical character under the PYD's centralized control. In this context, there was a constitution as part of a “progressive” justice system with provisions for people's courts, police forces (*asayish*), and prisons.

Further negative points have been compulsory recruitment—which came about as a necessity of the war—as well as the restraining of political structures outside the PYD's control. In some cases, members of these political formations were arrested. These events led to some demonstrations against the PYD, which were met with repression and, in some cases—as in Amuda—ended in bloodshed.

It's important to evaluate and consider whatever is going on there in comparison with the situation before the revolution, when Kurdish people didn't have citizenship, were considered second-class citizens, and didn't have the right to speak their language or own more than a certain number of trees or animals. Also, in order to understand the social achievements of Rojava's communities concerning multiculturalism and women's social status, we should view the conditions by means of comparison to the rest of Syria, where the religious element dominates. In order to understand the revolution's potential in the economic sphere, we have to consider that northern Syria had been organized in semi-feudal structures before the revolution. The relentless oppression in Kurdish areas resulted in the communities being based on solidarity relations and communalistic structures as proclaimed by their leadership as well as revolutionaries from all over the world who supported all these beautiful ideas and actions.

### **III: Civil War**

#### **The regime**

Meanwhile, the Iranian oppressive regime and the Shiite Hezbollah joined Assad's side and so did Russia, which provided support in order to have its interests served. This support contributed greatly to the preservation of Ba'athist power and the indefinite extension of the concomitant onslaughts. In this way, the regime maintained control of the capital and managed not only to prevent the collapse of a state under threat but also to protect the Russian military bases in Latakia and Tartus, situated on the coastline of the Aegean Sea. These bases were a key factor in Russia's decision to intervene.

#### **Regime-opposition clash**

Even though in the previous phase the anti-regime forces occupied small provincial cities, later on the FSA invaded larger cities, among which was Aleppo.

The regime's response was the intensification of onslaughts and the practice of indiscriminate bombing of unarmed populations in the areas occupied by the rebels. Barrels full of explosives were blindly dropped from helicopters inside the inhabited areas of eastern Aleppo, which was

occupied by anti-regime forces. Such events were typical of what daily life was like. Armed groups of thugs paid by the regime, *shabiha*, carried out horrid massacres against Sunni populations, inflaming sectarian hatred in Syrian society.

Under these circumstances, what might have initially seemed to be the regime's ridiculous propaganda turned into reality. When a civil war takes place in a country governed by a sect made up of ten percent of the most privileged, namely Alawites, the sectarian dispute takes on class dimensions, resembling strikingly the national dispute between Israelis and Palestinians. So, given that the regime itself promoted the element of sectarianism as a continuous and deliberate practice of social segregation, Sunni Islam ceased to be a mere religious identity. Instead, it started to symbolize the oppressed. Amid the despair of war and death, religious feelings get stronger and become an ultimate shelter for those who are vulnerable but must oppose the killing machine of the state. There is no doubt that someone who loses their children in a blind bombing conducted by the regime can easily turn into an extremist.

At the same time, anti-regime forces often clashed with ISIS, which was getting stronger as it took advantage of the bloodshed caused by the regime. The control of regions was constantly changing hands, and the regime, too, occasionally fought against ISIS to maintain its control.

Meanwhile, al-Nusra got stronger and increased its influence over the anti-regime side, while the FSA slowly weakened due to serious lack of military equipment and ammunition. To address this grave disadvantage, many of its brigades endorsed Salafistic rhetoric in order to gain the courtesy of the Gulf monarchies.

Al-Nusra imprisoned some anti-regime activists because they were considered dangerous due to their divergent political views, and many of these revolutionaries died when the regime bombed the organization's prisons and headquarters. Al-Nusra's policy has been totally sectarian, promoting the Islamicization of the revolution and the exclusive participation of Sunnis. Indicative of this policy was an attack against a left rebel group from the People's Liberation Faction which was heading for Aleppo in order to fight on the rebels' side. Two rebels and three members of al-Nusra were killed. Also, indiscrimination towards unarmed civilians is characteristic of al-Nusra's military action.

All the same, the internal situation of the FSA remained out of control. Its leadership met with an Assad regime delegation in Damascus in 2013 in order to reach a peace agreement, and this handling led lots of brigades to seek independence while lots of other members joined the better-equipped al-Nusra.

The anti-regime forces' overall military equipment remained poor compared to the forces they had to confront. They had no air force like their enemies did, and thus their leadership resorted to asking NATO forces for a no-fly zone. Of course, the US didn't care about the anti-regime forces' demands, understanding that they were not a controllable force. Lacking considerable equipment, they fought with improvised ammunition such as Hell Canons (mortars made of gas bottles), which turned out to be very dangerous for civilian lives as they lacked sufficient targeting capacity.

In the areas where regime forces had been cast out, the state's social structures gave way to the self-organization of the LCCs, which spread to cover all spheres of social life. A typical example of this are the groups that rush to bombed areas to gather and nurse the injured, dragging them out of debris wherever necessary. These groups save lives, acting under conditions of total destruction, risking and losing their own lives, and therefore are a living legacy of the revolution that deserves global attention. In spite of this, the White Helmets—who are the evolution and

unification of these groups under the umbrella of a non-governmental organization, have been slandered due to the funding they accepted from Western governments—although some choose to forget the massive amounts of money given by the UN to the Assad regime supposedly for medical equipment during the war—as well as due to their apparent relationship with armed rebel groups since they stayed and acted in the same areas.

Unfortunately, though, the social sphere was shaped under harsh conditions determined mostly by the deeply-rooted religious beliefs of the wider Arab populations of Syria—beliefs which gained momentum as people faced death—as well as the promotion of sectarianism by the regime, not to mention the influential power of the Gulf monarchies over the resistance through their material support in the form of equipment. All these brought Islamist rhetoric to the dominant forefront, and the position of women returned in large part to a pre-revolution state or even worse. More often than not, the fundamentalist groups who took over the resistance imposed their ideas on it. That’s why we see occasions like Aleppo, where the population supported the resistance and then went on to demonstrate against the authoritarianism and barbarism of these groups even under a state of siege and continuous bombings.

Apart from the dirty political games played by a large part of the left, this religious rhetoric also played a role in the anti-regime forces’ political isolation from the whole world. This fact has a reverse impact, since the revolution is, in reality, left in the hands of these forces partly due to the lack of international solidarity. Most likely, the situation would be totally different if anarchists and leftists had rushed from the whole world—as did happen in Rojava—to strengthen the healthy forces of resistance against the Islamist-conservative ones that sought to monopolize the fight against the regime (like a self-fulfilling prophecy). And we can imagine that the genocide could have been prevented if there had been a stop to the murderous apathy and isolation of movements around the world, and if strong, principled antiwar actions had begun to put pressure on the forces that are now keeping up the airstrikes unmolested.

### **Rojava: evolution of a social experiment and the war against ISIS**

Rojava’s cantons were getting bigger and eventually turned into a potent political and military force. The operations there received publicity because of the heroic resistance in Kobanê, and got support from the whole world.

In the beginning, Rojava was in a difficult position in the war against ISIS, and the canton of Kobanê was in danger. However, as a result of a strategic alliance with the US air force, which intervened when they thought that the YPG/J could become their best ally in the area for the time being, ISIS’s forces were repelled and YPG/J managed to advance their position. The female forces, which ISIS fighters were especially afraid of due to religious superstitions, played an outstanding role in this advancement.

As the YPG/J was gaining ground against ISIS, populations such as the Yezidis, who had suffered genocide, were set free. Moreover, the Kurdish forces led by the PYD enforced their political and military scheme of “war emergency” in the areas under their occupation, where the resident populations were of predominantly Arab origin. Parts of these populations were very suspicious towards the Kurdish occupation, and vice-versa. Since the PYD saw it as a great likelihood that people among the Arab population would turn loyal to the caliphate and avail themselves as potential suicide bombers ready to attack from the inside at any time, they treated them as dangerous—and forced parts of these populations to leave.

On account of all this, and given Rojava's success and the trust that the PYD inspired in its base, it appeared as a far more manipulable leadership than the Syrian opposition in the eyes of the US. Practically, all of this created the conditions for the US to direct their military support primarily to the PYD and base their air force on Rojava's ground. Of course, this alliance is very dangerous and its implications will be seen in the future. A PYD representative has already made statements praising the American state, its democratic structure, and its policy—statements which are very dangerous for the evolution of the Kurdish revolution, since, as it appears, the need to avoid bloody repression leads the PYD to assimilation. Unquestionably, decisions of this kind are not made by the self-organized structures but by the hierarchical structures of the party's administration. Also, there's no doubt about how an emerging authority is going to treat whoever sticks to the example of self-organization whenever (and if ever) the war ends and the time for forced assimilation comes.

The only conclusion to be drawn from the way imperialist forces intervened in the area is that they are not committed allies of a certain side. Instead, they act expediently, having their own interests in mind, and they won't hesitate to change allies to avoid direct clashes because they recognize each other's power. Meanwhile, the "collateral damage" caused by imperialists' airstrikes in Syria alone has reached hundreds of thousands of victims. Unsurprisingly, "mistakes" of this kind don't happen to afflict the state's military, which coexists there and continues to murder unbothered, because they exchange information about the positions of their troops precisely to prevent this from happening. At the same time, diplomats in luxurious living rooms are negotiating, exchanging smiles of courtesy as if they were playing poker.

### **The YPG/J's relationship with the regime and the opposition**

In the previous phase, parts of the anti-regime forces showed solidarity to Kobanê and contributed to the war against ISIS in rural areas. Their alliance, unfortunately, wouldn't last for long.

It didn't last because the PYD chose, on the one hand, not to acknowledge the Syrian opposition (balefully equating it with ISIS instead), and on the other, to strike an informal peace agreement with the regime so as to avoid further clashes. In turn, opposition groups chose not to acknowledge Kurdish autonomy either. The choice of the former is rooted in the history of oppression the Kurds have suffered under Arab rule, while that of the latter is linked with the interests of the Turkish state, which had pledged its support to the opposition.

The choice of no cooperation has had a dual impact. First, it translated into a grave number of lives claimed, and second, it marked a political and ethical squandering of an opportunity to lead both the regime and ISIS to demise. However, the FSA has had no unified stance towards the YPG/J, and some of its brigades coordinated their operations with the YPG/J in the war against ISIS. In the end, however, fierce clashes took place between the YPG/J and anti-regime forces over the occupation of certain areas.

A typical example of such an area is the one between the cantons of Afrin and Kobanê. The occupation of this area was necessary for the Kurds to connect the cantons—especially Afrin, remote as it is from the others. Turkey wanted to prevent this from happening, for fear of the Kurds' demands for autonomy. As this area was mostly populated by Arab populations and served as a supply route for anti-regime forces, the Turkish state sought to back FSA's brigades. Conversely, Russia's reaction was to strike an alliance with the YPG/J and use its air force to

bomb the villages under opposition control so that the YPG/J could “liberate” them. Later on, the situation reversed again, and it was Turkey that bombed the very same villages so that the FSA could “liberate” them this time.

Aleppo is another example of such a fight. In Aleppo, anti-regime forces occasionally clashed with the YPG/J at the borders of the province. The PYD’s choice to stay neutral in the war against Assad and occasionally ally with regime forces enraged the opposition and urged some of its brigades to invade Kurdish areas wherever the YPG/J had abandoned its control. Eventually, all this led to a tragedy. While some anti-regime forces initially rushed to announce the YPG/J’s accession to their side, in the end, bloody battles broke out. Until recently, the YPG/J, having control of the Kurdish areas of Aleppo province, has contributed to the regime blockade of the opposition-controlled parts of the city.

Very recently (on 27 November 2016), anti-regime forces suffered massive losses of territory after an attack launched by Assad’s forces, the Russian air force, Hezbollah, and the YPG. Specifically, regime forces took advantage of the proximity of the opposition areas to YPG areas and launched a united attack. As a result, the YPG seized ground from the opposition. These areas no longer share borders, since the regime has taken hold of even bigger areas between the two.

That’s what happens when revolutions are left in the hands of administrations that ally with state military forces in the name of a good cause. In reality, they safeguard their interests in statist terms.

As regards the tragic situation of the relationship between these two fronts of struggle, we believe that it is caused by a policy that doesn’t trust the people who revolt but is rather merely pre-occupied with the seizure of control and the establishment of authority wherever circumstances allow. In this way, the lack of solidarity and the opportunistic use of the Syrian revolution by the leadership of the PYD, together with the opposition leadership’s choice not to acknowledge Kurdish autonomy, led to deeper divisions and, ultimately, fierce hatred between Kurdish and Arab revolutionaries. This only benefits state forces, which everyone will have to confront eventually.

It’s important to mention that many Arabs fight on the YPG’s side, and many Kurds on the opposition’s side. There has been concrete and explicit solidarity at a basic level. There were Kurdish voices demanding that the YPG/J join the revolution against the regime that had brutally oppressed them. There were Kurdish parties other than the PYD which took part in the committees of the National Coalition and raised the issue of Kurdish autonomy, only to be disdained by the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, who represented their Turkish allies’ interests—alliances with the devil come at a price, it seems. Solidarity existed and was expressed within the bases, but it was the horizontal structures to solidify it that were missing.

### **The situation in November 2016**

At the time of writing, Syria has been in civil war for five years, a ceaseless massacre of the Syrian population. Deaths are estimated at over half a million, with most lives claimed in the “battles” between the regime and opposition, and the airstrikes of the regime and their allies responsible for the vast majority of the onslaughts.

This is not to negate the responsibility of NATO’s forces, which have historically taken the lead on airstrikes in the region. The terrible massacres they committed in Iraq, as well as the embargo they imposed (causing one million deaths from starvation and diseases) paved the way for the religious fundamentalism which nowadays contributes to the division and the perpetuation of



genocide in Syria. We mustn't forget that the leadership of the ISIS caliphate consists partly of former generals from Saddam Hussein's regime, which the US had initially backed but later went on to remove from power.

Even nowadays, the American air force is responsible for hundreds and maybe thousands of dead civilians in Syria, since its airstrikes in populated areas have been anything but targeted. It's worth mentioning that people in ISIS-occupied cities that are now being bombed had the courage to demonstrate against the Islamic caliphate; they also rebelled and bled in 2011, but today they still remain under oppression.

### **Open fronts between regime and anti-regime forces**

The situation in western Syria has been tragic. There are scattered open fronts in all provinces, while cities like Aleppo or the opposition-occupied suburbs of Damascus are in a state of siege, with one million people in Syria suffering starvation while being remorselessly bombed by Assad's and Russia's air forces.

At the moment of writing, east Aleppo is being remorselessly bombed by Assad's and Russia's forces, while the last self-organized hospital has been destroyed. Hundreds of people are dying helpless every day under debris or from the use of chemical weapons forbidden by international treaties. After months of siege, there is no more food or medicine and a population of 300,000 in the eastern part of Aleppo is being left to starve.

Under these conditions, the rebels are fighting a war to the bitter end against formidable forces, and despite the grave disadvantage of lacking an air force, show unique strength. This war has cost the lives of lots of soldiers, rebels, and civilians who happen to live in the war zones, as both sides use destructive weapons.

### **Fronts in northern Syria**

In northern Syria, the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces, consisting of and co-managed mainly by the YPG/J, Turkmen groups, Arabs, and FSA brigades), in cooperation with American military forces, have invaded the areas around Raqqa which were occupied by ISIS.

At the same time, the ISIS-occupied city of al-Bab, which is located further north of Aleppo and between the cantons of Afrin and Kobanê, is threatened by the allied forces of the FSA and Turkey. All this time, clashes have broken out between the FSA-Turkey military coalition and SDF over al-Bab because of its strategic importance to both sides. Basically, they are competing to be the first to take control of al-Bab, which is now controlled by a weak ISIS being besieged elsewhere as well in the towns of Mosul and Raqqa. At the time of writing, in the areas where al-Bab borders with Afrin and Kobanê cantons, some of the FSA's brigades, supported by the Turkish air force, are attacking the villages controlled by the YPG/J in order to prevent the creation of a passage between the cantons. This clash resulted in the discontinuation of SDF's operations in Raqqa so that they could blackmail the international alliance under US leadership in order to block Turkey's interests.

### **The regime's fronts with ISIS**

Despite the propaganda from some leftist supporters of the Assad-Russia alliance, there are no such open fronts in November 2016. Occasionally there have been some minor clashes, but the

only serious one was that in Palmyra, which had great symbolic and economic value (smuggling of antiquities). After its integration into the areas the regime controls, regime attacks against IS stopped. The regime's priority is the total defeat of anti-regime forces.

#### **IV. Analysis of geopolitical conditions**

The dominant powers divided the area of the Middle East into influence zones on their own account, disregarding any racial, religious, or cultural factors or how the populations are settled in the area. They grabbed rulers and drew new lines to mark borders not according to ethnic characteristics or even according to geographical specificities, but only with their profitability in mind, and shaped the conditions of the massacres to come.

During periods of economic stability, the economic and political elites of these countries govern the people dictatorially and exploit the natural environment in the interest of colonialist countries and transnational corporations. While profits soar and money comes easy, the plundering and the harsh exploitation continue with undiminished vigor.

As ruthless competition is the very nature of capitalism, exploitation is taken for granted, allowing both natural resources and people alike to get savaged and plundered. When economic crises break out, the markets shrink, and as a result the regions are redistributed in order for new economic conditions to be set.

During these redistributions, the competition among the market powers gets intense, and conflicts ensue. So when the figures and financial accounting don't seem to work out well—due to economic crisis or either the breakaway or new integration of these states into other alliances—they opt for military operations in order to enforce their interests.

We don't mean to provide a geopolitical analysis that sees the various movements in isolation, as they emerge and shape the course of history, rearranging or canceling the plans of states. The economic crisis was one of the causes of the so-called Arab Spring. People living in those areas were suffocating, and their suffocation worked as an explosive in the Arab world. When the spark appeared in Tunisia, the fire spread everywhere.

What matters is exactly this power that emerges from the bottom of the social pyramid and that forces states to readjust their mechanisms. This element is made up of several forces that appear united when there is a substantial incentive for people to take to the streets, putting hatreds aside and achieving great things. However, when political conscience, collective memory, and material preparation are absent, it is very easy for the crowds in revolt to be manipulated.

That is why we are not going to fall into the trap of idealizing these forces. We know that they bear the characteristics of the world they live in. They are people who rally around religious, racial, economic, and political communities that engage each other often in dirty ways. What happened in Tunisia and Yemen is perhaps the easiest way to stop a revolution: basically, institutions remain unchanged and the demands of the insurrectionists are not addressed whatsoever. For the sake of social decompression and dispersion of social unrest, some regime figures are simply replaced.

In this course of events, we have seen the division of the forces mentioned above, and their transition from war against a regime in demise to a war among themselves. When the regime's violent attacks do not translate into an internalization of loss on the part of the people and thus the people are not the ones to mark the dividing line in the war, there begin the hidden agree-

ments with powerful businessmen who give their instructions to ensure that any anti-regime fight is dismantled, destroyed, and devoid of any meaning in the end. The case of ISIS is a typical one, because it served as a tool for the US, Russia, and their agents to bomb and conquer with a view to reducing internal social reactions.

When division isn't enough to destroy a revolution, then raw oppression increases. That's what happened in Bahrain, or in Libya, where NATO used the pretext of protecting human life from the murderous forces of Qaddafi to invade. The result was that during the seven months of NATO-orchestrated airstrikes, the number of deaths was ten times higher than the number of deaths during the first month of the revolution.

We mustn't forget that the dominant powers are not gods, after all. There is a chaotic situation they are trying hard to handle: one that can't be easily or fully controlled since lots of power-thirsty nuclei turn against one another, each with distinct interests. Indeed, the landscape changes when crowds dare take a dynamic role in what history entails and decide to cancel all their plans. Eventually, the role of the great powers during chaotic situations is to preserve their influence and strike alliances solely for the sake of their interests.

### **Geopolitical interests at the beginning of the revolution**

The US had several reasons to be pleased with the withdrawal or at least the debilitation of the Assad family. Later on, we are going to thoroughly examine the main aim behind the decision to let the Syrian state's institutions remain untouched with only a few minor adjustments. For sure, if Syria's new government were hostile towards Russia, then the latter would definitely have been deprived of its most direct access to the Aegean Sea—its naval bases in Tartus and Latakia.

Also, the more land the West keeps under its control in the Middle East, the more commercial roads it controls. The pipelines in the areas of these countries are very important for Europe's energy supply, and Syria's geographical location in particular is crucial to the geopolitical and economic plans drawn by Western capitalists. Europe's (and especially Germany's) energy independence from Russia is one of the United States' goals. If that happened, it would result in a profound decrease in Russia's influence over European countries as well as its overall economic weakening. There were more than a few times in the past when the European states were hesitant or even unwilling to back the economic sanctions the US imposed on Russia precisely because of their energy dependence. So Russia had every reason to pursue a military intervention in Syria, seeking to protect its interests, both geopolitical and economic.

Apart from the Western powers, there are also the regional ones. On the one hand, Iran has repeatedly and explicitly stated that it supports Assad unconditionally in order to preserve a valuable ally in the area. Syria's territory is vital to Iran as it strives to maintain a natural passage to Lebanon and Hezbollah.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, despite its good relationship with Assad's regime before the revolution (it was one of the biggest investors in the Syrian economy), acknowledges that Assad's removal or debilitation equals the weakening of its regional opponent, namely the Shiite Iran. Also, Saudi Arabia focused on funding and equipping radical Islamist groups with the aim of shifting the demands of the revolution away from freedom, democracy, and justice to other directions, since such a struggle would shake their own fragile order from within. After it nurtured them, it ended up competing with them, aiming to crown itself the dominant power over the Sunni population. The strategy of polarization it followed (by executing the anti-regime

Shiite clergyman Nimr al-Nimr, for example, as well as members of al-Qaeda) was obviously meant to concentrate Sunni forces under its manipulative protection.

Turkey's involvement had more to do with Erdoğan's views concerning the natural extension of its borders. By gaining control of northern Syria and northern Iraq, he wished to become the main trade intermediary between the Middle East and Europe. This strategy failed due to Kurdish dominance in northern Syria as well as the blockade of Turkish forces after the operations against ISIS in northern Iraq. So, in August 2016, Turkey invaded Syria, fighting tooth and nail to prevent the unification of the Kurdish cantons and to obliterate the Kurdish struggle for autonomy, since it was obvious what the potential success of such a project could mean for southeastern Turkey. Russia and Assad seemed to tolerate this invasion as long as the Turkish forces and the Syrian brigades under their control kept away from Aleppo, which had long been besieged. Even though the US initially applauded Turkey's involvement in the fight against ISIS, it wasn't long before they showed their discontent with the first Turkish attacks against the Kurdish militia, who were the main allies of the US against ISIS. So, after the battle over the re-occupation of al-Bab, the US withdrew its support from the international coalition under its leadership, announcing that their interest would focus on support to the Kurdish re-occupation of Raqqa. We have no doubts that the US kept it in the back of their minds that the Turkish army is a constant bogeyman for the Kurdish people, and especially so if the latter should decide to diverge from US influence.

What is also important is that Turkey and Russia approached one another anew after a period of unstable diplomatic relations caused by the shooting down of a Russian warplane. The cancellation of promising trade agreements (for example the gas pipeline Turkish Stream—a plan now reborn from its ashes) as well as the sanctions they imposed on each other would have had a damaging impact on both economies, and thus the hatred wasn't deemed profitable and didn't last long. Having broken off from America and away from the European Union, Turkey added fuel to the fire by announcing that it intended to buy anti-aircraft systems from Russia. The severe oppression that Turkey's government has reinforced inside the country, its diminished influence on neighboring countries, the intention to reintroduce the death penalty, the provocative statements concerning the treaty of Lausanne and the issue of Cyprus, the constant violation of Greek airspace—all this interweaves a dangerous tapestry beyond prediction.

Finally Assad: this murderer, whose only goal is to remain in power, claimed that the revolution against him was an attempt by terrorists to overthrow him. Israel couldn't have been more pleased by the constant tension in the area, since it's a military state occupying parts of its neighbors' territory for the last sixty-eight years, has taken part in six regional wars, and still perpetuates a ceaseless war against Palestinians. When you are surrounded by enemies, a state of constant war benefits you, since your enemies' forces are preoccupied fighting on other fronts, and as a result, the forces you have to face are weakened.

## **The ghost of anti-imperialism**

The harshness of our times breeds disappointment, and that in turn breeds confusion. When we choose to clear it up by means of accumulating more power in order to interfere more, then many times we will be led to amorality and opportunism without experiencing any crisis of values. Eventually, we end up with artificial polarization for the sake of simplicity as we strive to understand and interpret such a complex and chaotic world. Inevitably, we are trapped in deadlocks, fanaticisms, and monster-makings; blinders and unconsciousness.

Parts of the left who are yet to depart from Stalinism and statist views have felt obliged to choose a bloc of power to pledge their support to, and this has created a political paradox. They support the massacres committed by Assad's regime and his allies (Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and China), considering them a form of resistance to the advancement of Western imperialism.

Here we must note that there are different levels of paranoia. Some voices might still advocate for Putin's "struggles," regarding him as a savior from the American monster, while some others restrict themselves to uncritically supporting resistance groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, portraying the powerful players that surround them as necessary evils. Also, we must add that even some anti-authoritarians, having been unable to effectively disseminate the anarchist imperatives of self-organization, anti-statism, and anti-authority, internalized their failure and set out to influence large social bodies during a period of crisis and "objective circumstances" by resorting to fixed and historically "tried-and-true" recipes, negating values and ideological boundaries and endorsing the extremely contradictory analysis above.

But why is the logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" or "I have to choose the lesser of two evils" wrong, after all? Simply because in either case one fails to realize that unless they assimilate, the enemy of their enemy will be hostile towards them as well, and also that the lesser evil has one and only one conscious goal: to grow bigger and one day, who knows, overpower the currently dominant evil.

For someone to believe that the "defeat" of the US and its allies by Russia in the Middle East will bring a better future to the oppressed populations of these areas means that they identify people's struggles with the interests of forces similar to the ones of Western imperialism. The only difference, at least for now, is that these forces are not dominant. All these forces have a role to play in capitalism and favor their own transnational corporations. They use war, propaganda, and oppression as a means of enforcement. A glimpse at their internal characteristics is enough for someone to see the oligarchic cliques who govern, the harsh oppression and exploitation of the lower classes, the absence of a welfare state, the death—slow or fast—that they impose.

The former Soviet Union drowned so many uprisings in blood. Nowadays Russia has become one of the most important trading partners of European imperialism (Gazprom supplies a large part of the European market with gas). It has used its military machine in Chechnya, Afghanistan, Georgia, Ukraine, and now Syria. It has coordinated military actions with European countries against ISIS while inviting the US to partake in the "New War on Terror" in May 2016, only to get the disarming answer from the US secretary of defense that they will attack only ISIS and not al-Nusra or anti-regime forces. As we will analyze below, it has negotiated and already agreed with the US on Syria. And this is hardly the beginning.

The "anti-imperialist" state of Iran, with its supreme religious leader who arrived in 1979 from his exile in Paris (where he had stayed on a tourist visa), after being prosecuted in Iraq, won't step back. Khomeini destroyed the struggle of the working class for self-organization and laid the foundations for the reconstruction of a capitalistic economy. This Islamic democracy is so democratic that all powers are concentrated in the religious leader's hands. Even more so, the Guardian Council—whose members are appointed, not elected—control most of the other elected officials, who must first get the council's approval before taking part in elections. Regarding social policy, things are extremely simple: if you are a dissident, if you resist, protest, or revolt, then you will be repressed. If you insist further, then you will be put to death. In this context, communists were imprisoned, executed, and eventually politically exterminated when the regime came into power.

We deem it significant to refresh our memory regarding the cooperation of once sworn enemies.

The Shiite government of Iraq—that is, a puppet of the US—survived and continues to survive thanks to Shiite militias who are equipped and funded by Iran. Also, the same Shiite militias fought and continue to fight against ISIS in Iraq (in Fallujah, Mosul, etc.) under the protection of the international coalition led by the US. The imperialists conduct the airstrikes while the “anti-imperialists” advance on the ground. And all this is happening because they now need to get rid of the religious mafia that had once served their economic policies and military operations. ISIS, after obscuring the peoples’ uprisings against poverty and oppression, went on to strike a trade deal with transnational corporations, selling off the area’s resources, and now—after having become autonomous—it is an alibi for murderers of every nationality.

When it comes to trade, the US-Iran deal—apart from the geopolitical exchange and new fine-tuning of the power balance—means also the transfer of amounts of uranium from Iran back to Russia, the creation of a nuclear reactor, and the lifting of some economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the West. This way, the modern punishers of the crusaders conclude trade agreements at every opportunity with every mighty infidel who is willing to give lots of euros or dollars. Iran’s society is technologically advanced and consists of eighty million people. In times of shrinking markets, it is easy to understand what games are being played.

Even though it tends to be forgotten, we cannot fail to mention one more crucial associate of the “anti-imperialist axis,” China. China has provided economic and military support to Assad’s regime (with advisers and fighters from Afghanistan and other nearby states). China is also the largest importer of raw materials from eastern European countries and the largest exporter of products to these countries. After all, it’s a common secret that it has ambitions of global economic dominance, and its strategy to this end is not a military one; economic dictatorship is relatively bloodless and inexpensive, totalitarian and thus highly effective. In reality, China’s state capitalism is every bit like the institution of slavery that existed in the US—one that continues to exist through its prisons and criminal justice system.

Bashar al-Assad, on the other hand, derives his basic arguments for his “anti-imperialist” bragging from his “support” for the Palestinian and Lebanese people in their struggle against Israel as well as his supposed traditional hatred for the US. Hafez al-Assad was a member of the alliance under US leadership in the first war against Iraq, however, and this caused objections among Syrian intellectuals, since Saddam was highly popular in Syria. After meetings in Damascus with the US secretary of state at the time, James Baker, Hafez agreed to offer 100,000 soldiers to the cause, even though theoretically Syria was under the influence of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Bush government congratulated him on the limitation of terrorist groups that could harm American interests.

The example helps us to better understand the peculiar relationships of the ruling classes in the states of the Middle East, northern Africa, and the Gulf with the imperialist powers of the East and the West. Analysts have come up with the term *frenemies*. When there is partial or complete identification of interests, there is coordination and improvement of relationships. Otherwise, relationships go sour and there is economic competition, war of attrition, or even actual war. So when Gorbachev refused to supply Syria with sophisticated weaponry and simultaneously allowed the mass movement of Jewish people from the Soviet Union to Israel, the father Assad didn’t hesitate to turn to his former enemies. As usual, fragile alliances are defined by interests and not by tradition or ideology.

Likewise, following in his father's footsteps, Bashar al-Assad cooperated with the US on security issues in the "War on Terror." Basically, his contribution was to detain and torture inside Syrian prisons those handed in by the CIA in order to extract information on the latter's behalf. The best-known case is that of Maher Arar, who lived in Canada. After his arrest at the New York airport, he was interrogated for thirteen days for suspected relations with al-Qaeda. He was sent to Syria, where he was held for ten months and tortured for answers to the same questions he had been asked in the US. As soon as he was proved innocent, he received a compensation of 10.5 million Canadian dollars as well as an official apology from Canada's prime minister, but the US made no official statements on his case whatsoever. Of course, he wasn't the only one.

What is more, we can't omit Hillary Clinton's statement on "Assad the reformer" at the beginning of the uprising, when she highlighted that this phrase expresses not only her own view but that of other members of congress. Moreover, in 2008 French president Sarkozy had invited Assad to make a speech at Elysium because he hadn't yet become the bloodthirsty dictator he is today. Finally, before the beginning of the revolution in Syria, plenty of the country's resources ended up in European markets. We can't be so naive as to believe that Syria would sell its petrol to Russia, Russia to Iran, and Iran to Syria on the grounds that trade in capitalistic terms occurs only among friends.

Let's now examine Syria's relations with Lebanon and Palestine. The involvement of the Syrian state in Lebanon's civil war amounted to a military occupation which began in 1976, ending only in 2005 after the people's uprising following the murder of Lebanon's former prime minister. Syria's primary aim was the constraining of Muslim Palestinians and their allies (pan-Arabists and leftists) so as to protect the Christian phalangists, who practically held the official power in Lebanon. So the Syrian intervention crushed them and thus played a crucial role in the disappearance of communist and left Lebanese organizations like LRNF, which later refused to cooperate with Syria in resistance against Israel. At this point, let's not forget that Syria cooperated closely with the US in 1989 under an agreement with the Arab states aiming to terminate the Lebanese civil war. In particular, Syria agreed to send 40,000 soldiers to the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, only to gradually withdraw them after the Lebanese military had regained control.

A second example that reveals the real nature of Syria's relationship with the Palestinians is that of the fight against king Hussein of Jordan known as Black September, when Syria abandoned them within only five days, forcing them to capitulate and, as a result, face the possibility of being slaughtered. The attitude of Assad's regime towards the Palestinians also became apparent by the way it treated those who lived on Syrian territory. At the beginning of the revolution, Assad accused them of instigating and participating in the uprising on the side of "extremists" who meant to overthrow him. Consequently, he killed and imprisoned Palestinians while he blocked and besieged the Palestinian camp Yarmouk. Lastly, Palestinians in Syria who supported the Intifada or the Syrian revolution were wanted by the security forces. Assad himself officially stated that Syria has no relations with Hamas any longer, given that its leader had expressed his support for the "heroic people and their rightful demands for freedom, democracy, and reform" in 2012, recognizing the events in Syria as a revolution and not the product of a conspiracy.

It's obvious that the strategy of Assad's regime was to use the Palestinians as leverage against Israel in the negotiations over the Golan Heights, which have been in Israel's possession since 1967. Through these negotiations, the Syrian state was aiming to achieve a peace agreement; it hasn't used military force against Israel since 1973, not even to retaliate against attacks on its territory. It was never interested in Palestinians' liberation from the Israeli occupation. On the

contrary, it abandoned them or slaughtered them. In any case, we all know deep inside that all the individual state officials we described above are also scum. This is why we intend to get closer to the core of the “anti-imperialist” axis below.

Hezbollah (“Party of God”) was officially founded in 1985 by clerics in Lebanon, with help from Iran, so as to serve as the organization that would oppose Israel. Its fighters were trained by Iranian Revolutionary Guards who arrived in Lebanon through Syria. It is a Shiite religious organization and, as its deputy has stated, it’s a matter of principle for them to follow Iran. Hezbollah managed to gain considerable respect in the Arab world owing to the battles it fought against Israel in 1985 and 2006. It’s a state within a state in Lebanon (its army is bigger than the official one, let alone the fact that it occupies a certain number of seats in parliament), and apart from its military action, it has also performed important social acts. In comparison with other jihadist groups, it can be considered one of the more progressive ones as it shows greater tolerance to other religions; its declarations propose that Lebanon’s government should be Islamic but that this decision lies with the people themselves.

In one of his speeches, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah expressed his support for the early uprisings of the Arab Spring but didn’t include the one in Syria, which had started to unfold only some days earlier. He criticized the religious sects and described the people’s demands as rightful and he rejected the scenario of a “West-driven Arab Spring” as conspiracy theory. Somewhere after this point, the contradictions begin. In 2011, Hezbollah supported the overthrow of the Yemeni dictator Saleh, who described the uprising against him and the ones in other Arab states as US- and Israel-orchestrated actions. In the end, he relinquished his position in order to be granted amnesty by consenting that the vice president would succeed him. Let’s note at this point that he had also participated in the US-led alliance in the “War on Terror.” In 2015, a civil war broke out between Yemen’s government and the Shiite rebel Houthis, who were pursuing the re-enthronement of Saleh. Interestingly, Iran and Hezbollah supported them even though back in 2011 Hezbollah had declared itself in favor of Saleh being deposed.

Concerning Egypt, in 2013 Hezbollah welcomed the removal of Morsi (who was a supporter of Hamas) due to his relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood and his support of the Syrian revolution. Hezbollah took a positive view of Sisi’s authoritarian regime since it had supported Assad’s regime. Sisi imposed an embargo and a blockade on Gaza; he destroyed the tunnels and closed the Rafah crossing (opening it only a few times for very short periods), and he officially described Hamas as a terrorist organization. He adopted a compromising rhetoric, appearing equidistant from Israelis and Palestinians, but, in reality, he supported the powerful one and limited his support for the persecuted to hypocritical charities. Hezbollah did not respond to any of the above.

So even though Hezbollah supported the uprisings of the Arab Spring (Yemen, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain) as authentic and fair, it made a complete U-turn in its rhetoric when the Syrian revolution broke out. It claimed that the events in Syria were instigated by the US and Israel in order to topple Assad, who is the “cornerstone of resistance against Israel.” As a result, since 2012 it has had military involvement in the Syrian war, coordinating its action with the Syrian and Russian airstrikes and taking part in blockades and sieges like that of the town of Madaya.

The core of the propaganda the leadership used in order to legitimize its involvement in the Syrian revolution as a repressive force against the insurrectionists was the fight against Sunni extremists and “mercenaries of the West.” In particular, every fighter who died in battle, including those against Israel, was considered to be performing jihadist duties. This was an attempt to add



credits to its record of resistance and, simultaneously, to justify a strategy which, of course, had little to do with resistance at all, given that it stemmed from the orders of Iran's leaders. Hence, it turned from an organization of resistance into a Shiite paramilitary reactionary force. Even its former leader expressed his deep opposition to "Hezbollah's support for the criminal regime of Assad, which kills its own people and has never shot a bullet to defend the Palestinians."

Let's not forget that as soon as Hamas openly supported the Syrian revolution, Assad terminated any relations with them. Hamas moved its headquarters from Damascus to Doha in Qatar, a country that belongs to "the enemy's" axis of interests. Also, in 2012 its relations with Iran and Hezbollah deteriorated (with reports mentioning that Hezbollah asked for the removal of Hamas's members from Lebanon, though both Hezbollah and Hamas denied this), but in 2014 (namely when the war in Gaza broke out) they were restored. Since March 2015, however, their relations have been in decline again as Hamas announced its support for the alliance under Saudi Arabia's leadership which is fighting against Houthi rebels in Yemen. Moreover, Hamas didn't help Hezbollah in the war against Israel in 2006, while correspondingly Hezbollah didn't help Hamas in the war against Israel in 2008–9. Also, Hamas consistently receives help from Turkey and Qatar—countries that are affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and belong to the power bloc that fights against the notorious "axis of resistance." There are formal reports (even though Hamas disputes this fact) indicating that Palestinians from Syria, Gaza, and the ranks of Hamas fight on the side of Islamist Sunni groups in Syria and share their expertise in the construction of tunnels. Basically, Palestinians—who are a cornerstone reference for the "axis of resistance" against Western imperialism—fight alongside the "Islamist-fascists that the West has bred in order to topple Assad."

A final example is that of Nasrallah's statements after Mosul's seizure by ISIS in 2014, saying that "Hezbollah is ready to sacrifice five times more martyrs in Iraq than in Syria in order to protect mosques, since the Iraqi mosques are more important than those of Syria." Again, Hezbollah is connected to the Shiite militias of Iran, which fought against the US-led coalition in Iraq, and its members carried out administrative and coordinative operations in the battle against ISIS. In February 2015, its leader admitted its presence in Iraq and its participation in battles there.

As we understand it, the states competing in the international arena follow the logic of "my enemy's enemy is my friend, and, then again, my enemy." This is why they make decisions that may come across as irrational, but in reality this is not at all the case. The resistance organization of Hezbollah works this way as well: even though its past fights mostly inspired the Arab world in the war against the felonious regime of Israel, the US, and their allies in the area, since 2012 it has followed the above logic entirely.

Nevertheless, for the sake of an even-handed approach we must once more highlight the sectarian conflicts in the Muslim world as well as the fine line we mark between grassroots fighters and the leadership of organizations. We mustn't forget that from approximately the seventh century AD until 1979, Shiite Muslims, besides being a religious sect, were also among the most fiercely oppressed populations, with all Muslim regimes persecuting them. This changed after the establishment of Iran's Islamic democracy in 1979 under Khomeini's leadership (he is regarded by lots of Shiites as the thirteenth imam—in other words, the chosen one who will save them). Therefore, Iran presents itself as a *de facto* protector of all the Shiite populations—oppressed or not—of the Middle East.

At this point, we must mention that the religious conflict has intensified, especially in the last fifteen years, mainly by the Talibani al-Qaeda in Iraq (under al-Zawahiri's leadership), ISIS,

and other jihadist groups, with constant bomb attacks on Shiite holy sites and mosques which leave behind carnage and death. As a consequence, we find it likely that some of the fighters from the ranks of Hezbollah don't act merely as Assad's mercenaries but are, instead, broadly mobilized in response to the fight against the Islamic groups that murder Shiites in Iraq. This, though, doesn't acquit the leadership, whose most recent geopolitical choices (*i.e.* support for Assad, Saleh, Sisi, etc.) denote a strategic shift from being an ally of the Palestinian resistance to becoming an executive branch of Iran in the region.

We believe that the information above suffices to drive home the point that the "axis of resistance" (*i.e.* Iran, Assad, Russia, Hezbollah) doesn't aim at freeing the Palestinians and other populations of the area. The alliances of "frenemies," as well as the contradictions and inconsistencies in their rhetoric and strategy, clearly show that their plans are drawn upon ephemeral interests rather than a set of ideals or ideology. They are also clear indications of intertwined interests and intricate interdependencies among various authorities as well as proof of the emptiness of their supporters' arguments. History has shown that when states and groups with authoritarian structures engage in influential war games, they will do whatever it takes to defend their interests, which are by no means the same as those of the people below. More often than not, in these kinds of hierarchical and partisan organizations, the values and the incentives of the bases and the leaders differ significantly. But if the central administration manages to impose itself, we are then led to the complicated and hostile situations we described.

When the power of political theory gives way to dependence on transnational corporations, when people assign the management of their lives—through elections or other forms of "consent"—to seemingly "anti-establishment" quacks like Syriza or Trump, the last thing we need is yet another leadership striving to impose its own political agenda. People who define themselves as fighters or revolutionaries have ended up supporting bloodthirsty, murderous regimes. Their irrationalism goes as far as to allow them to recognize—and, therefore, support—the 2011 events in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen as revolutions on the grounds that they turned against US-friendly regimes, while at the same time they condemn the revolution in Syria despite its similar causes and demands; this happens only because it turns against a dictator who apparently belongs to the axis of interests they support. Their action is driven by statist logic and geopolitical analyses that take no heed of the dynamics of social outbursts whatsoever. They become more autocratic in order to impose themselves by means of violence or imaginary offsets, promoting fractures and new repressions.

Our position is that the war against the state and capitalism needs faith in community and self-organization, as well as faith in ourselves, in order to break the dependence on a world structured to suit leaders and in order to be able to organize our autonomous, horizontal, and self-sufficient structures here and now, to guard them politically and militarily, and to prepare ourselves to spread them when times demand it.

## **The agreement on Syria**

Ultimately, what does the US's "defeat" in Syria mean? Basically, it doesn't mean anything at all. As we have already mentioned, the American state would have had lots of reasons to be satisfied with the Assad family's overthrow or even weakening. But this doesn't mean in any way that it aimed at the abolition of the state's institutions. Indeed, the experience of Iraq, where the overthrow of Saddam brought about the collapse of all state structures, is not to be repeated. It's

been proven that “solutions” like the ones in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen are much more effective. Instead of the state’s seizure, which requires military occupation, the US’s new strategy is to preserve the regime’s basic structures and, of course, its capitalistic and authoritarian nature, promoting only superficial alterations, like the appointment of people that would serve (or at least won’t oppose) their interests. This way, stability and order are ensured in the area and so is the continuity of the profitability and safety of Israel and the regimes of the Gulf.

Certainly, due to reasons we are going to analyze further on, they didn’t accomplish this in Syria, and from a very early stage they had to capitulate. Practically, they reached an agreement with the Russian state with provisions for the termination of the war, a political transition, and Assad’s short- or middle-term stay in power.

One reason why the USA capitulated regarding Assad’s stay in power as head of a “transitional” government is the military and economic aid the regime was and is receiving from the Russian and Iranian states. After a certain point, it became apparent that the situation in Syria’s territory—who controls what—couldn’t radically change. No side had the power to seize full control of the territory and openly confront all other involved powers. Even though there are cases like the city of Aleppo, where the combating powers might take turns besieging and advancing, the regime- and opposition-occupied territories remain(ed) relatively stable. Also, even if we assume that one side might indeed have the military power to defeat the other, it must then live up to the demands of maintaining control of the occupied areas, and, as it seems, no side has the army to accomplish such a mission. Therefore, a military solution for the Syrian issue is actually impossible, and politics is where the weight should be.

Another parameter is the other fronts which the American state is concentrated on and considers of greater economic importance. The TTIP/TTP agreements, the renewed expansion of American capitalism in Latin America, the competition with China over the passages of the Pacific (products worth millions of dollars are transferred through there daily) are some of those. Also, the large number of refugees moving from war zones towards European countries has turned the “stabilization” of the area into an imperative. The so-called “refugee crisis,” in combination with the attacks of ISIS in European countries, compelled the US and EU to leave Assad’s removal aside in order to fight ISIS, and lots of leaders came up with the idea of an alliance with Assad to accomplish this aim.

Lastly, the developments following the Syrian revolution set an ominous example of what other potential revolted populations of the world may be facing in the future (even the populations of deprived southern Europe...). As the revolution was followed by nearly six years of totalitarian war, it is obvious that the initial demands of the Syrian population have mainly given way to an everlasting hatred towards the slaughterer Assad. In a nutshell, all the external forces involved in the Syrian war accomplished their common aim: nobody is talking about revolution anymore, as the zones of interest have been divided. The only thing left is the enforcement of a peace agreement and a transition from the profitability of war to the profitability of stability.

The fact that there are reasons indicating that the US agrees with Russia on Assad’s future doesn’t necessarily prove that this is indeed the case—there is, however, a series of events that corroborates this conclusion.

The armament that the American state provided FSA groups with was scarce and by no means heavy (the rebels never received anti-aircraft weapons, for example). The reason for this, most probably, was that the FSA leaders had no absolute control of the brigades underneath them, and as a result the US didn’t deem them trustworthy. In Obama’s new plan, which was endorsed

by the US congress, five million dollars was pledged towards the armament and the training of select forces within the opposition, with the following aims: protection of the Syrian population and US allies from ISIS terrorists; safeguarding the territory controlled by Syrian opposition from terrorist threats; creation of conditions for a negotiation that would permit the end of clashes. This plan, though, was a complete failure.

Concerning the negotiations in Geneva, the preliminary draft of the agreement about Syria in the summer of 2012 clearly mentioned that Assad would be allowed to carry out duties in the transitional government scheme—provided, of course, that the opposition would consent. This agreement was signed by all five permanent members of the UN security council (the US, Russia, China, the UK, and France). The opposition’s delegation (which can definitely not claim to represent all Syrians) wanted the end of the war since it had agreed on its position in a postwar Syria. But they saw no point in signing an agreement that would allow Assad’s short- or long term stay in power, given that they would be incapable of enforcing it upon the people whose interests they were supposed to be serving.

The opposition was occasionally but heavily pressured to sign by the US secretary of state, John Kerry. He frequently threatened that the US would withdraw their support unless they enforced the agreement upon the people of the areas they theoretically controlled. Kerry also refused to satisfy their demands for a discontinuation of the Russian and Syrian airstrikes before the initiation of the negotiations, saying that such terms were not a prerequisite and that Assad’s resignation wasn’t necessary before any agreement. In December 2015, after a meeting with Putin, Kerry stated that the US and their allies weren’t aiming at a change of regime in Syria. He also stated that the discussions with Russia didn’t concern what could or couldn’t be done with Assad in the immediate future. Rather, they addressed how peace would be reached in Syria so that the Syrians would be able to decide on their future and that no people should be forced to choose between a dictator and terrorists. Thus, the Syrian opposition’s demand for Assad’s immediate removal was obviously not a proposal to start the negotiations with. Finally, at a conference in February 2016, when two members of humanitarian aid groups called him to take action towards the termination of the war, Kerry’s off-the-record reply was that they should blame the Syrian opposition and not him, and that they should expect three months of destructive airstrikes. Likewise, in December 2015 the French minister of foreign affairs stated that he wasn’t aiming for Assad’s removal any time before the political transition and that Syrian combatants (Assad’s regime and the FSA) should unite against ISIS, which was an option that even Kerry had envisaged. Angela Merkel had also stated that the fight against ISIS meant discussions with many agents, including Assad, while David Cameron stated that the possibility of Assad playing a role in Syria couldn’t be ruled out.

At some point, the EU and US’s interest switched from Assad to the military defeat of ISIS as a prime enemy and international destabilization factor. France and Russia conducted air force operations jointly in the “New War on Terror,” and the US focused on the empowerment of the Kurds, it’s basic ally in the fight against ISIS on the ground.

It appears—at least for now—that although the event is officially attributed to airspace violations, Turkey shot down the Russian warplane because the attack launched by the Russian air force had targeted the northwest borders of Syria with Turkey, which is an area controlled by anti-regime forces (mainly Turkmen) and thus by Turkey and, by extension, NATO. Unsurprisingly, the West addressed other Russia-conducted murderous airstrikes with a mere condemnation statement because the targeted areas were controlled by rebels—not their allies. There has

been no substantial reaction to the dirty work done by Russia and Turkey in Syria, because the states of the West were intending to pressure the opposition into an agreement with Assad—one that would let Assad remain in power—and know well that the attacks against those still resisting can serve their purpose. At the same time, popular reactions within Russia and Iran are almost nonexistent.

Another incident indicative of the situation is the statement of the US defense secretary in April 2016 claiming that al-Nusra dominates in Aleppo. At once, Russia and the regime took advantage of this statement in order to bomb Aleppo, even though they had agreed on the termination of hostilities. Al-Nusra and ISIS were excluded from this agreement. After being put under pressure, the US defense secretary publicly refuted his unsubstantiated statement.

All of the above can lead us to only one conclusion: the lie, which has become a common narrative in the West, that the war in Syria is continuing because the US is trying to overthrow Assad while Russia is trying to keep him in power, appears to be so believable because it is veiled with a truth, which is the existence of antagonism among different power blocs. However, at this point we are not talking about a little white lie but rather an attempt to obscure the deliberate undermining of a revolution against a dictator, a revolution with demands for freedom, justice, and equality. The task of stripping the Syrian struggle of its meaning is realized under the auspices of both democratic/secular and fundamentalist/jihadist leaders who jointly massacre the insurrectionists. These massacres in Syria—from the air or on the ground—are perpetrated by the US, Russia, Europe, and Iran. While they have killed over half a million people and forced millions to flee, they kept negotiating their shares inside luxurious hotel rooms and are still trying to finish off any remaining resistance against Assad in order to impose their agreement. Therefore, we call everyone to contemplate whether the people who are being murdered on a daily basis in Syria deserve our support or not, and decide if it's worth taking action to bring this genocide to an end.

## V. War Economy

Even though we have analyzed different aspects of geopolitical competition as well as the interdependence of capitalist forces, a more direct way to understand these very particular and intricate relationships is perhaps to analyze a trait that all authoritarians undeniably share: the desire for money and all that goes along with it.

It has been written that war is the continuation of politics by other means. Historically there have been competitions among capitalist power blocs that reached the stage of direct and totalitarian military clashes (*i.e.* World War I and II), because the shares weren't enough for everyone involved. The result of these wars is the emergence of the winners as hegemonic powers—with some winning powers being more hegemonic than others—and the destruction of those defeated (whose recovery and reconstitution is always a profitable business as well).

But in our times, economic management (*i.e.* economies of debt, financial institutions and products, commercialization of every possible aspect of our everyday lives, ruthless and ever-increasing exploitation and impoverishment, and, of course, authoritarian regimes to enforce all of the above) has, at least for now, postponed such a war. The aim of the initial involvement of the great powers in the revolution in Syria was not only to crush the struggle (either militarily or by way of obscuring its meanings) but also to generate rounds of negotiations towards an

agreement that could reshape the balance of the very same powers—political, economic, and military. Instead of a direct military face-off among the dominant powers, a war stage was created for everyone to show their teeth. To all those involved (international, regional, and local players), these negotiations/wars work as a field for profit-making. They design a “war economy,” one everyone can benefit from, given that “losing” equals gaining somewhat less.

Syria’s territory is now divided into areas that are under the control of different forces. There are parts controlled by the regime, others by the FSA, others by Islamist opposition groups, others by Kurdish groups and others by ISIS. In each area resides a population that produces capital that ends up in the hands of each “leadership.” Here we must note that the values and aims of each leadership determine the manner of export and redirection of the capital it accumulates. Consequently, there can be seen fundamental differences regarding the procedure of each capital export and use. Here, however, we are only going to cover the ways this capital is accumulated.

Apart from the taxes imposed on people who live in the area ruled by this or that power, in Syria’s war zones the formal economy is supplemented by the black market. Trade and smuggling, mainly of basic goods (food and medical equipment), weapons, and petrol but also of human flesh, flourishes. As always, the cost is basically determined by the simple law of supply and demand. Thus the necessary food for people’s survival is overpriced due to the shortage in supply combined with the great demand, while the necessary weapons for the people’s extinction are becoming cheaper and cheaper. Paradoxical as it may seem.

However, none of these areas is self-sufficient. To cover its needs (and the special needs war generates), it needs imports. So the taxes from trade inside the borders of Syria are one more source of profit for the forces in control. For this peculiar kind of internal trade to be possible, some requirements are necessary, like agreements between opposing sides over things like a standard exchange rate of the Syrian pound to the dollar throughout Syrian territory, the existence of exchange spots that enjoy some safety and protection in different areas regardless of who controls them, a central bank in Damascus that prints money, and safe trade routes that each side will recognize as neutral (this is the case even between sworn enemies like the Assad regime and al-Nusra).

Then we see another paradox unfolding. Maybe both sides of the conflict disagree about how they could coexist and that’s why they kill each other, but they do agree, when necessary, to ensure that money flows after it is accumulated and so on.

At a global-regional level, trade works pretty much the same way. The existence of wars means the trade of weapons and telecommunication systems between states. For example, the warfare exports of Germany (mainly to states of the Middle East and North Africa) for the first half of 2015 amounted to 6.35 billion euros, which is nearly the total value of the sales for all of 2014. Also, the price of a weapons system that has been proven lethal enough in real war conditions skyrockets since its efficiency is considered tested. The more they kill, the more accurate they are, the more they are valued. Unlike cars, bombs need to prove their lethality in test-drives before they sell well.

Moreover, both in times of stability and war, the largest amounts of natural resources in these areas (petrol, natural gas etc.) are sold to the same international corporations, irrespective of the interests the latter might serve (*i.e.* American, Russian, European, or Chinese). There’s only a slight difference, though. In times of war, the prices are up to ten times lower because the official trade gives way to smuggling. For example, the string-pullers and leaders of ISIS sold petrol drilled in areas under their control (and transferred it by land through Turkey or through Iraq’s

pipelines in agreement with the Sunni bourgeois classes, meaning circles connected even with the official opposition) at much lower prices than those found in times of stability.

Overall, the war in Syria is a comprehensive destruction of capital. The over-accumulation reduces demand and, of course, the international corporations present in destroyed states will take over their reconstruction. As regards human resources, the evolution of capitalism has an inevitable result, which is the increasing impoverishment of ever-growing populations. So when the middle class is proletarianized, the proletariat becomes superfluous. Therefore, they have to be slaughtered, or turned into a cheap labor force to work under conditions of modern slavery, or become inmates of concentration camps and prisons.

Another—even more dystopian—scenario could feature the impact of modern Westerners' shortsightedness. Trapped in a microcosm of their own as they are, Western societies show a terrifying comfortability with ruthless massacres of whole populations, as well as a scornful obliviousness to the planet's depletion of resources or the destruction of whole ecosystems. Eventually, they seem to feel astonishingly at ease with the cult of a dominant technocratic dogma which propagates the necessity of a drastic decrease in the global population. Fundamentally, the systemic need for ever-increasing rates of profitability sustains the vicious circle of overconsumption and overproduction. Nobody, at least for now, can predict the future, but unless we succeed in the destruction of the existing sociopolitical and economic structures, most probably the color of our societies will be that of blood and ashes.

## **VI. Conclusions**

### **Our compass is social revolution**

Complex events like the revolution in Syria are determined by a plethora of factors. The reasons, causes, and—primarily—the competing interests a revolution reveals are factors that must all be taken into account in any analysis. However, the focal point of, say, a historical analysis might differ significantly from that of a political or an economic one. In this respect, a geopolitical analysis that is fully in service of statist views and interpretations can only focus and reveal different aspects of history from those of a sociopolitical analysis that sets out to serve the revolutionary point of view, which takes a class-based or anarchist approach. This clarification is crucial because it's rather easy to endorse mere geopolitical conclusions and therefore diverge from our main aim as anarchists, which is the social aspect of the conflict.

It is indeed not difficult at all to unintentionally lose sight of the goal in complicated situations like that in Syria, especially when taking sides for or against state entities or having a blurred picture of who has possibly allied with whom. Take the sympathy for Assad's regime and the Russian state as an example: it's expressed by a platform that is vehemently anti-American. Conversely, we also see sympathy for the American state among the same people owing to its temporary alliance with the YPG. Likewise, according to the logic that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," sympathy for the Russian, American, and European states may grow lightheartedly and solely because they fight the Islamic fascists of ISIS or even support Kurdish people as a nationality, seeing them as an internal destabilization factor and a threat to the fascist state of Turkey. Following this senseless logic, why shouldn't someone be sympathetic to the Turkish state, then, possibly because it represents capitalistic interests hostile towards the Greek state, which is our own internal enemy?

Therefore, the criteria for supporting a struggle—in this case a revolutionary procedure—are different from any mighty sympathies and alliances occurring in a war. As clearly seen above, alliances with the devil are definitely taking place. Nevertheless, we can't be the ones to let the devil take "the least of these" amid all this obscurity.

Out support for a struggle—moderate or fervent—depends on whether it identifies with our class interests and anarchist perspectives on social organization. The ones from below must always be supported in a progressive and revolutionary perspective. After all, this is the very notion of international solidarity. From this political perspective, support to any state entity—big or small, Eastern or Western, more or less imperialistic—is not an option. The anarchists' compass is grassroots solidarity and the values and interests proclaimed can't be other than horizontal social structuring, communalism, and harmonic coexistence with the natural environment. Our interests can't be the same as those of capital. They simply can't back—explicitly or implicitly—the prosperity of elites, of bosses and state entities, regardless of whether alliances may occur for reasons of physical survival during clashes between opposite sides. When physical survival is inconsistent with political survival, then the goal is lost and the struggle for freedom can easily be transformed into an agent of authority.

As a rule, there is nothing set in stone in a dynamic situation such as a people's uprising; every single moment shapes and defines the extent to which the struggle upholds its liberating revolutionary nature. Our criticism of and solidarity with this struggle must be geared along the same lines. When we are informed about the slaughter of whole populations in Syria, our only option is to fight off this state terrorism. When we are informed that conservative anti-regime forces and regime murderers are both challenged by revolutionary voices, we should back these voices. When we are informed about communitarian endeavors of horizontal social structuring, collectivization and antifascist struggle, our only option is to fight by their side. If the immediate goals of our struggle ever appear to be in sync with state-capitalistic interests, then this must be taken into account from a tactical point of view, without attempting to obscure conditions, mislead, or plunge ourselves into confusion. Things are crystal clear, since our struggle in its essence can't ever be in sync with authoritarian (bourgeois or socialist-communist) or capitalist (state or private) interests in the long run.

The evolution of the Syrian uprising brings us yet again before some fundamental realities. The residents of the cities and villages of Syria gave a new meaning to their everyday life through self-organization and solidarity. Where state structures had collapsed, local coordination committees emerged to ensure the coverage of basic needs such as nutrition, medical care, counter-information networks, water and electricity supply, and whatever else was needed. What was missing and proved to be critical for the future of the revolution was the self-organization of defense. The lack of experience in illegal action turned the rebels into easy prey for Assad's army and mercenaries. The appearance of armed groups—either of a fundamentalist nature or of the brigades that split off the government army—provided refuge to the rebels. This is basically the law of survival. When all sides attack you, you will trust the first one to offer you even the faintest hope of salvation. Political gauging comes next.

Time and again, history has taught us—and those people who were present at the Syrian revolution confirm this—that whether we like it or not, the ones who bear arms are the ones to shape the political agenda. This holds true not only in terms of the crude exertion of authority and establishment of power; it is also what legitimizes the stances of individuals or groups who put their lives on the line. On this account, they gain an ethical advantage over those who don't



risk as much due to their position or their weakness or even by chance. Besides, with the Greek reality in mind, the renown of our revolutionary movement stems from this very fact. There have been persecuted, prosecuted, and executed fighters in its classes, and the toll comes for the whole movement, which can't be compared to a non-militant political group no matter how revolutionary the latter's rhetoric may be. However, regardless of any ethical or material advantage, the truth is that "power comes from raised fists and not from kind faces. It's gun barrels that power comes from and not mouths. Comrades, this was known and remains real."

So if we truly want to hope for our revolutionary initiative to stand, we must have the armed power to defend it. The development of our self-organized infrastructure goes hand in hand with the empowerment of our armed groups. Self-organization is not only an anarchist revolutionary imperative, but also a human reaction when all certainties collapse. What this means to us, as anarchists, is that we must defend the rebels who build new social cells in a revolutionary procedure, but even more so, we must inspire people about how to defend their achievements by means of expropriation of repressive forces. As history has shown any number of times, no regime will give in to pleas; rather, only force is capable of challenging another force on equal terms.

At this point we can turn to the enlightening example of the initial achievements in the Kurdish areas. Unlike the rest of Syria, there the development of self-organization included a parallel organization of an armed force able to defend territory. In this case, the three-decade experience of Kurdish rebels both in forming an illegal political body and in conducting guerrilla war against the Turkish state played a paramount role. The efficiency of the YPG/J's forces caused the US and later Russia to change their stance. The heroic and successful fighting-off of ISIS in Kobanê in 2014 made the Kurdish libertarian achievements known to the whole world. Even if the militant structures that defended the social achievements in western Kurdistan weren't entirely self-organized or horizontal, still they proved vital and determinant to the survival of these achievements.

Another major contribution to this result came from the international solidarity movement. After the uprising broke out in the Kurdish cantons, there came the first reports on the self-organization of social and economic life which urged lots of anarchists, libertarians, and communist revolutionaries from Western countries to join the fight for the defense of the revolution. In contrast, the rest of Syria witnessed the rapid prevalence of centralist ideas—religious or secular—and this prevented the revolutionaries of the world from seeing the uprising of the Syrians as part of the wider international libertarian struggle despite the horizontal characteristics it bore initially (and actually these characteristics persist to a certain extent today, especially under the terrifying conditions of war-torn neighborhoods like those of Aleppo, where Assad and Russia have jointly committed unparalleled atrocities). It's in the nature of centralist structures (states, organizations, political parties, etc.), regardless of the label or title they bear (democratic, communist, national, Islamist, civil, etc.), to try to subjugate and stifle any horizontal and anti-hierarchical structures. That is the reason why it is crucial to be informed of not only the declarations but also the practices applied.

A blanket rejection of the masses in revolt in Syria as fundamentalists or West-manipulated puppets means that our ideological blinders impose a tunnel vision on how we see a situation that is, in reality, not far from our goals anyway. Rejecting the grassroots local committees formed in Syria merely because they don't call themselves anarchist (and why should they anyway?) means that we consign the living revolutionary history to oblivion. These rebels, whose fate is

connected with the fate of all rebels of history, could be us. Perhaps not all uprisings bear the same libertarian characteristics that we, as anarchists, consider liberating. For example, in all the uprisings of the Arab Spring, that of Syria included, the most prominent protests followed the routine of Friday's prayers in the mosques—as have those of the people in Palestine all these years. That's where people gather and that's where they expressed their opposition to the regime. That's where they began to believe in their power and claim their dignity. That's the point when they became radicalized and declared they are no longer willing to unresponsively witness yet another bloodshed committed by security forces.

If we imagine ourselves in any uprising or revolutionary process of the past, we will come to realize that under such circumstances there always comes into play a wide spectrum of viewpoints, stances, and convictions. Let's take a moment to visualize a similar situation set in Greek reality. Despite the absence of acute or racial differences, polarization might, here as anywhere, suffice to bring about a collapse of existent structures, which in turn could result in the intervention of various international and regional forces, leading to opportunistic alliances driven by choice or necessity before chaos prevails.

December 2008 could possibly be our experiential point of reference, since it was a moderate social uprising in terms of both the subgroups it mobilized to take to the streets as well as the level of violence used by both sides. However, communication among the rebels was particularly difficult and the disruption of social life in the metropolis was distinctive. What next comes to mind is that in a widespread uprising, when the size, proportion, and complexity of the situation are all increasing dramatically, those who gain the people's trust are fundamentally those who can guarantee relative safety. In other words, it's those who possess both the determination and the means to find and use weapons to defend their structures and attack the security forces of the regime—enemy number one of any rebellion.

Something else we need to keep in mind as anarchists and revolutionaries is that the intervention of dominant power blocs is bound to happen not only in regional state-on-state wars but also in the emergence of any spontaneous unrest that goes against the authorities and their institutions. Every similar uprising that seeks a revolutionary future will come up against power blocs that share interests with the challenged regime. Perhaps other power blocs will support the rebels in an attempt to manipulate and control them. Various statist and authoritarian formations will pursue intervention in order to promote their interests and, ultimately, will claim to play a leading role in the aftermath of unrest. Possibly, in such a process, we might have to ally with powers that we share no common ground with, or, even worse, we would normally criticize or oppose. In all wars, be they revolutionary or otherwise, alliances are struck not on the basis of opinions but rather by gauging the actual needs of conducting the war itself. Typical examples are that of the Spanish anarchists who allied with a government they'd been persecuted by, or ELAS (the Greek People's Liberation Army), who received money, information, and officers from the English state in order to become more effective in the guerrilla war against occupying forces. In the case of Syria, we see the PYD allying with the US and Russia. In history, alliances with the devil abound, and in the end they always come with a toll.

The recent reality of Syria, in combination with the proliferation of uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, altogether compose a living archive of experiences and conclusions. It's important to go beyond the mainstream and statist analyses and trace the roots of the social dynamic that gave birth to the Syrian uprising. The Greek and global revolutionary movement will stand before new verities, much of which will stem from what is happening in Syria right now.

Official statistics mention that four million people have been displaced within Syria alone—this is nearly one fifth of the country’s population before the war. The massive number of refugees outside the country has changed the relationship between the EU and Turkey for the worse, and has intensified divisive tendencies within the EU. The audacious expression of fascist rhetoric by large parts of society within the EU is now a fact. The capitalist crisis, the immigration issue, the sporadic yet resonant attacks of fundamentalists in Western cities, the increasing divisive tendencies, the spread of the battlefield all around Europe from Morocco to Ukraine—all this together composes an explosive mixture.

European societies, one after another, are slowly but steadily getting drowned in a low-intensity war which will inevitably be intensified. Those in power are well aware of it, and are getting prepared by turning their forces against both external and internal enemies. The increase in joint military drills, the cooperation on energy issues and information exchange, the closure of borders, the enforcement of administrative detention (only upon refugees...at least for now), the militarization of the police, and the tightening of EU counterterrorism laws are, if anything, indications of reduced self-confidence among the dominant powers. They are preparing for war, and we ourselves are among their targets. Our preparation as revolutionaries for an undeclared yet glaringly emergent war must draw on both historical examples and contemporary experience.

### **Internationalist solidarity**

The ongoing battle in Syria raises a number of questions and teaches plenty of lessons. Some questions lead to relatively sure conclusions. One important conclusion is that in a social revolution, effective safeguarding of the struggle and communitarian self-organization of the social base must go hand in hand. Another conclusion is that the better equipped the movement is, the more possibilities of political and physical survival it has. To put it simply, power comes indeed from blazing guns...but let’s not forget that the enemies of the rebels have guns to burn. That’s what they rely on, after all: their material superiority. Therefore, we, as revolutionaries, know well that our power is commensurate with the size of the social base we mobilize (which is, in turn, inextricably connected with the power of weapons). As we say, “Solidarity is the weapon of the people.”

Even more so in our times, our grassroots base must be wide enough to include both local as well as global social powers. We all acknowledge how critical it is to spread our struggle beyond narrow local boundaries. An important parameter of the struggle is also to exercise pressure on foreign governments, which would never remain neutral given that they always share certain interests with the local elite (political, economic, military, etc.).

On the other hand, contributions to the struggle at close quarters is another big chapter. The international brigades fighting on the side of the revolutionaries were, and still are, a living part of history. It is of no great importance here to recite examples of concrete solidarity throughout the whole history of revolutions. It would be interesting, though, to have a look at the other side, namely that of our enemies. There, the “counterrevolutionary history” is full of examples of “foreign” forces rushing to their rescue. In Syria in particular, we’ve witnessed the jumping in of both conservative fundamentalist international fighters of ISIS and pro-government mercenaries of the regime. Besides, it’s a foregone conclusion that capital knows no borders; in reality, it uses borders—together with nationalist ideas, religious fanaticism, etc.—whenever and in whichever

way it sees fit. In case Assad and his allies—that is, the dominant local elite of Syria—prove “victorious,” they will be presented as the official symbols of national pride and unity, even though they had their asses saved thanks to external interventions.

We’ve seen this happen in Greece as well, where the domestic saviors of the nation managed to serve their own interests with the help of English and American military forces. International solidarity in the form of class interest comes high not only on our agenda but on that of authority too. In this context, the distinct interests and values of social antagonism and, correspondingly, the most beneficial alliances become more apparent—and the network of parasitic interlocutors (elites, bosses, authoritarians, states) can’t impose itself on their common enemy despite its material superiority. Our basic goal, therefore, must be to support revolutionary struggle on an international basis by any means possible: political, economic, or military contributions, either from afar or by our very presence on the actual battlefield.

### **The ones from below together with the ones from below**

In a nutshell, the only sure conclusion we consistently come to draw from every uprising, revolution, war, or any other violent rearrangement of human-geographic and economic factors, in general, is that the better prepared we are for the clash, the more possibilities we have of prevailing physically and, thus, socially. Every day, each of our moves is part of revolutionary preparation, even if there is no concrete plan made in advance.

Each assembly or other horizontal structure builds relations of interpersonal trust; it helps people recognize one another as fellow travelers on common paths, destroying the alienation of mass society. Self-organized structures, squats, grassroots syndicalism, self-organized clinics, eco-communities, etc., are the first cells of the social structure we are heading for, and these experiences help us familiarize ourselves with the procedures of self-organization which we would wish to develop under chaotic conditions such as those of war.

The creation of illegal structures, the acquisition of weapons, information, etc., can be first and foremost a material and psychological preparation for the defense of our communities and, by extension, a source of inspiration for others to expropriate and use the enemy’s weapons themselves in an endeavor of widespread self-organization of our everyday lives.

Solidarity with refugees, meaning the ones directly affected by the bloodshed, provides a concrete solution to their immediate basic needs and leads to valuable experiences and relationships. Putting pressure on our states by organizing events, demonstrations, direct actions, etc., against the interventions made by the US-American and Russian superpowers—who slaughter and force immense populations to move solely because they had the misfortune to live inside their geographical zone of interest—means that we take a side in this and every war. We are on the side of the rebels and the self-organized structures; we are against centralist, statist, secular, fundamentalist, and any other authoritarian formation.

## **VII. Addendum: The latest developments in the Syrian war [January 2017]**

The last two months created new realities and added new variables to the vast slaughterhouse of the Syrian civil war. Six years after the revolution of 2011, the war is still on in full extremity.

Here is a brief update on the new facts and developments that have taken place up to today (January 2017).

In the first half of December, the criminal airstrikes conducted jointly by the regime and the Russian state in the rebel-held neighborhoods of Aleppo continued unabated, and so did the siege. One after another, rebel neighborhoods fell into the regime's hands. An important role in this was reserved for the fascist state of Turkey. By invading Syria with the operation "Euphrates Shield" at the end of August, Turkey forced the most manipulable parts of the FSA and some Islamic organizations like Ahrar al-Sham to unite with the Turkish army in operations against both ISIS and the SDF. Turkey managed to gain considerable control of the leaderships of these organizations despite strong reactions from grassroots fighters (many of whom deserted their ranks, defecting to other organizations including the former al-Nusra). Eventually, these leaderships moved lots of fighters to the "Euphrates Shield" operation, draining the defense of Aleppo. When these fighters left for al-Bab, what some months ago seemed nearly impossible came true. On December 22, the whole of Aleppo fell into the regime's hands. With nearly the entire east side destroyed by airstrikes, with thousands of dead and injured, with even more refugees, there unfolded a real genocide perpetrated by the Assad regime and his allies.

The city's occupation by the regime was followed by an agreement on the evacuation of the last neighborhoods occupied by rebels (with the well-known green buses), and by a series of further atrocities. Hezbollah and other Shiite militias carried out massacres, plundering, and attacks on civilians, while on the other hand some fighters of the former al-Nusra Front burned the buses used in the evacuation of women, children, and the injured from two Shiite villages, Kafriya and al-Fu'ah, which were besieged by the rebels in Idlib province. Refugees from Aleppo were settled in military camps in Idlib. After their arrival, demonstrations against the genocide of Aleppo and in solidarity with the revolutionary Syrian population took place in all the areas controlled by anti-regime forces as well as in many areas of the world, from Europe to North America to the Gaza Strip.

After the occupation of Aleppo, which had long been a key target of the regime for economic, military, and symbolic reasons, Turkey and Russia mediated a "truce" which they signed on December 29. Right from the very first hours, it became apparent that the so-called "truce" meant only to serve the interests of the Turkish and Russian states—and, of course, Assad's regime. ISIS, the SDF, and Tahrir al-Sham (formerly the al-Nusra Front) were excluded from this "truce." This gave the regime the chance to bomb and attack whichever place it pleased in Syria as long as it hosted (or was claimed to be hosting) even the smallest core of fighters.

Taking advantage of this "truce," Assad attempted to occupy the remaining areas around Damascus controlled by anti-regime forces. From December 23 on, the Assad regime and Hezbollah launched a formidable attack against a cluster of villages called Wadi Barada—located fifteen kilometers northwest of Damascus—which posed the threat of becoming a new Aleppo. The water sources there that supply the capital had been under the control of the rebels since 2012. On December 22, the residents of Damascus had been left without access to drinking water. Anti-regime forces blamed the regime for bombing the water sources, while Assad blamed the former for contaminating the water with petrol. Despite the withdrawal of the al-Nusra Front from the area in July—according to others, there is still a core of thirty fighters there—the regime claimed that most of the fighters belonged to al-Nusra and continued airstrikes in the area, while Hezbollah advanced slowly but steadily through fierce battles on the ground.

As Wadi Barada was gradually turning into the main front of the war, the declaration of “truce” was spreading the battlefield all over Syria (the district of Idlib, the besieged city of Madaya, the western Ghouta—suburbs of Damascus controlled by rebels—Homs, Hama, the district of Aleppo, and Yarmouk). Meanwhile, the front between ISIS and the regime escalated, mainly as a result of the former’s initiative: with an unexpected operation, ISIS reoccupied Palmyra and areas of Deir ez-Zor.

There have been no significant changes in the past two months as regards the “Euphrates Shield” operation conducted by the Turkish state and certain anti-regime rebels. The al-Bab battle continues as is, without any response to aggressions coming from ISIS even though the latter has caused marked damage to the Turkish army as well as the rebels. However, the recent approach between the Turkish and Russian states has led to joint airstrikes by the two countries’ forces against ISIS targets based in al-Bab.

On the other hand, the operation of the SDF (YPG/J and certain brigades of the FSA), under the auspices of the US-led coalition, which provides guidance as well as a valuable air force, continues its successful advancement towards the villages north of Raqqa, the “capital” of the Islamic State.

The picture also includes US drones relentlessly targeting Islamist rebels; mainly those who belong to the former al-Nusra Front. This US strategy dates back to September 2014, but after the declaration of “truce” it intensified sharply.

The next stage was the conversation in Astana, Kazakhstan on January 23 regarding a “political solution” to the Syrian affair, with participation from Assad, Iran, Russia, Turkey, and certain representatives of anti-regime forces (mainly from brigades, secular or Islamic, whose leaderships are partially controlled by Turkey). Many rebel groups were leery of these conversations due to the constant violations of the “truce” on the part of the regime. Throughout January, demonstrations and protests of the revolted population of Syria continued in districts under opposition control, with demands for rebel unity, the fall of the Assad regime, and the termination of sieges on rebel-held areas.

To sum up, we have a Russia-Turkey convergence driven by common interests. This in turn led to anti-regime forces controlled by Turkey to abandon their goal of overthrowing the regime, and turned them into pawns of its own political agenda. A historically steadfast antagonism between a NATO country and Russia is left aside when it comes to Syria, so that any remnants of the flames of resistance get obliterated.

Besides, the imperialists managed to strike a deal in the end, put new marks on the maps, and do business as usual. Those who don’t acknowledge receipt of an agreement on their defeat will bleed. In pursuit of “stability” in the region, the US has long been promoting the regime and now even backs Assad himself; after the agreement, they’ve been targeting anti-regime nuclei.

What is tragic in this story is that the armed insurrectionists still trust political parties—religious or secular—as intermediaries of their struggles, which results in their consequent submission to foreign interests. That’s why we see large parts of the FSA and Ahrar al-Sham serving as the ground forces of the fascist state Turkey, which uses ISIS as a pretext to prepare attacks against the revolted cantons of Rojava. Similarly, the SDF has become the infantry in service of the US-led coalition against ISIS, targeting also Tahrir al-Sham (the former al-Nusra). Unfortunately, despite its religious extremism and authoritarian characteristics, Tahrir al-Sham has attracted all those who were left over: those who won’t enter into an agreement of surrender to the felonious Assad regime because they won’t relinquish their demand for the overthrow of

a tyrant, especially after the bloodshed they suffered. These interrelations have increased fragmentation and inaugurated a new civil war between the rebels of Tahrir al-Sham and the rest.

The most recent developments confirm that the imperialist powers involved are indifferent to the overthrow of the regime. The opportunistic incentives behind their involvement are revealed as they support those armed parties that managed to prevail by undermining the self-organized structures of the revolutionary communities they had once pledged to defend. Eventually, they threw the revolutionary struggle into disarray and led their ranks of insurrectionists to fragmentation.

In conclusion, the Western and Eastern imperialists march in unity and concord, ridding their way of any threats to the graveyard peace they want to impose, so that they can, unbothered, pave the transition from an economy of war to the stability of free capital flows. Their message is straightforward: Dare not revolt to overthrow your tyrants. And it is not just Syrians they are addressing; rather, it's all the oppressed of the "unstable" region of the Middle East and North Africa, and even the (still deaf) citizens of the First World. They strive to make clear that whoever revolts is bound to bleed.

Unfortunately, the desertion of the revolution and its conversion to a civil war became a reasonably foreseeable end from the moment the armed fight passed from the control of the coordinating committees to the hands of those parties that promoted interests foreign to the Syrian revolution and its goals of freedom.

Of course, for us as revolutionaries, the revolution is always the bet no matter what the conditions. Therefore, just as we support self-organization coming from small groups in our domestic struggle regardless of their fluctuating dynamics, so do we regard the Syrian struggle: we consistently support the self-organized coordinating committees and all those fighting for the fledgling values of the revolution against Assad, those who refuse to take orders from neighboring or distant states and thus do not partake in felonious agreements. Plenty of protests are already taking place in rebel areas with demands for the fall of the regime and rejection of an agreement of submission.

What is crucial is to not leave them alone this time, especially now that they are enfeebled and far fewer in numbers after they were abandoned to be massacred and subdued by the most obscurantist forces. The aim is to bring the flame of the uprising to our neighborhoods and put our imperatives into practice, without failing to support those who self-organize their social life and armed defense on other areas of the planet. They might have never had the chance to know of our theoretical approaches, perhaps they don't fully endorse them, or they might still be driven by religious deceptions—but still, they act upon instinctive principles of liberty; they fight against tyrants and introduce procedures that are relevant to all the insurrectionists of the world.

Let's extend our support not only on the occasion of their victories but also their defeats. Let's not allow the warplanes that bomb them to be supplied by European brokers. Let's try to connect and communicate with them instead of abandoning them to be slaughtered. Let's intensify the social pressure that will break the wall of silence and combat the apathy towards the events unfolding in Syria.

For no revolution is one too many in our revolutionary plan, and no regime—totalitarian or bourgeois-democratic—can serve the interests of the oppressed.

We must learn our lessons from the successes and mistakes of the Syrian revolutionaries in order to prepare our smaller or bigger uprisings, and organize actions of solidarity with the revolted, wherever they may be.

**Korydallos Prison, January 2017**

**DEVOTED TO ALL THOSE WHO SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES FOR THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION**



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