

# **Syria: Assad will not be overthrown if ISIS “Jihadists” are not overthrown**

Thursday 16 January 2014, by [DAHER Joseph](#) (Date first published: 14 January 2014).

**Interview of Joseph Daher, member of the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria, with Turkish comrades of the Devrimci Sosyalist İşçi Partisi (DSiP).**

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**The Western media claimed that the Syrian Revolution was good in the beginning - but recently it has been hijacked by jihadists who have seemed to be the major force on the ground. Has the events of last 3 days proven the opposite? How did it all start against ISIS?**

Joseph Daher - The mainstream medias, whether in the West and in the Middle East, and Western and regional governments have been wanting us to believe that the Syrian revolution is dead and has transformed itself into a sectarian war between the Sunni Majority and the religious and ethnic minorities on the other side, or in a similar trend resuming the events in Syria in an opposition between jihadists vs the Assad regime. This last perspective actually pushed many to join the camp, composed of conservative right wing to “anti imperialist primaire”, arguing that Assad is a lesser evil to the Jihadists, while we should oppose both because they nurture each other and are both seeking to establish an authoritarian system. This following statement is typical of this trend:

*“We need to start talking to the Assad regime again” about counterterrorism and other issues of shared concern, said Ryan C. Crocker, a veteran diplomat who has served in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. “It will have to be done very, very quietly. But bad as Assad is, he is not as bad as the Jihadists who would take over in his absence.”*

In addition to believe that cooperation with the Assad regime is the best way to struggle against jihadists and Islamists [\[1\]](#) extremists groups is to ignore the history of this regime in instrumentalizing and cooperating with them such as with jihadist groups after the Iraqi invasion by the USA in 2003 or Fateh el Islam in Lebanon in 2007, and to forget that the regime is the one to have freed most of the jihadists and Islamists extremists in the various amnesty calls since the beginning of the revolutionary process while democrat activists were kept in prison, assassinated and targeted by the security services.

A similar comment could be made to a section of the left that has abandoned the Syrian revolution because it was allegedly hijacked, or not even supported it since the beginning. For example, Tariq Ali declared that he believed that popular movement has been “ overtaken by the Muslim Brotherhood and groups to its Right, backed by Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Deserters from Assad were taken over by Turkey and France. So the character of the uprising changed by the end of the first twelve months. How can one not register this fact? The relationship of forces today does not favour any secular or progressive groups. To pretend otherwise is to be blinded by illusions or the requirements of intra-sectarian left politics”. The events of the last few days have shown the

opposite... His blindness is due in his lack of analysis and perspectives of the possibility of radical change from below shown by the Syrian revolutionary masses since the beginning of the revolution. Another comment to make is the continuous problem of analyzing the Syrian revolutionary process from a geo-political perspective, ignoring completely the socio-economic and political dynamism on the ground in Syria. And many continue to consider Iran, Russia, or Syria to be anti-imperialist states struggling against the USA, which is wrong on every aspect. Our choice should not be to choose between on one side the USA and Saudi Arabia and on the other side Iran and Russia, our choice is revolutionary masses struggling for their emancipation.

As Pierre Frank, French Trotskyist, wrote : *"Let us note that the greatest theoreticians of Marxism did not at all define the political nature of a bourgeois regime by the positions which the latter held in the field of foreign policy but solely and simply by the position it occupied in relation to the classes composing the nation"*

In addition, both sides have been trying to impose a solution from above that would maintain the regime with a Yemeni solution (change the head of the regime, while maintaining its structure).

The struggle against the Assad regime and the jihadists are necessary in the struggle for democracy, social justice and secularism. Seeking the lesser evil is the road to defeat, while hiding or silencing the counter revolutionary and reactionary nature of jihadists or some islamists groups like the Islamic Front because they are struggling against the Assad regime is mere opportunism and the road to the failure for the Syrian revolution.

And we have seen that the Syrian revolutionary masses know exactly this threat by deepening their revolution in struggling against sections of the counter revolutions represented by ISIS.

The popular anger against ISIS authoritarian practices and reactionary ideology in the liberated areas of the Assad regime has been mounting for months. We should not forget that popular resistance against ISIS has been occurring for a while, for example in the city of Raqqa liberated from the regime in March 2013, youth and popular organizations of the city have been demonstrating and opposing ISIS nearly since its liberation. Numerous campaigns and demonstrations have take place against the authoritarian practices of ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra in the city. There were solidarity gatherings demanding the liberation of kidnapped activists held in Islamist-held prisons..

Similar protests contesting the authoritarian and reactionary practices of the Islamists took place in Aleppo, in Mayadin, al-Qusayr and other cities like Kafranbel throughout the year 2013.

We should also remember that some jihadist forces, such as Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS, have concentrated on trying to reach hegemony in some liberated areas attacking activists and FSA battalions, rather to fight against the regime, while many jihadists pouring into Syria from countries like Iraq and Lebanon are not flocking to the front lines. Instead they are concentrating their efforts on consolidating control in the northern, rebel-held areas of the country. Many Jabhat al Nusra fighters left in the middle of ongoing rebel operations in Homs, Hama and Idlib to head for Raqqa province once the provincial capital fell in March 2013. During the battle for Qusayr in late May, Jabhat al Nusra units were noticeably absent. In early June, rebel reinforcements rallied to take the town of Talbiseh, north of Homs city, while Jabhat al Nusra fighters preferred to stay in the liberated areas to fill the vacuum that the Free Syrian Army affiliates had left behind.

We have repeated constantly that these jihadists and islamists reactionary groups are an enemy of the revolution, alongside all groups that encourage sectarianism, kidnapping, torture and murder, as a practice of power must be considered enemies of the revolution to fight.

At the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014, the popular frustrations and anger exploded following new acts of violence from ISIS, especially by the murder by this latter of Dr Abu Rayyan, a doctor member of Ahrar Sham an Islamist group part of the Islamic Front, and of FSA and some Islamists groups members, in addition to the attack on Kafranbel media center on December 28 2013 and the kidnapping of some of their members.

In the eyes of the people ISIS was another face of the Assad regime because of its authoritarianism, like a banner in a demonstration on December 27 2013 in Maraat al-Numan in Idlib was saying *"The majority of us have become wanted by two states (the Assad regime and ISIS)"*.

On January 3 2014, demonstrations occurred in different locations where ISIS was present to demand its departure and overthrow. Chants *"Assad and Da3ech are one"* or *"Da3ech, get out"*, which have become widely used for a while now in liberated areas of Syria, were heard everywhere. Military members of ISIS were arrested in some villages, while other ISIS battalions were kicked out after popular protest and military fights.

ISIS had to leave many areas, killing often the people, including activists, women and children, that were held in their prisons.

Popular protests and military fights between FSA and Islamic Front battalions against ISIS are still happening as we speak. The pressure of the popular masses has pushed military battalions to act against ISIS, especially the Islamic Front recalcitrant in the beginning to engage military against ISIS. The creation of the Syrian revolutionary Front in December 2013, which is a gathering of FSA battalions, also helped to coordinate actions of local FSA groups to launch this action.

The Syrian revolutionary masses have proven for a while that their revolution is not dead and never have been, but it the world that did not and don't want to see it

**What are the dynamics behind the offensive against ISIS? Is it a plan by the pro-Western opposition to get the West back to their side again? Or a major explosion of anger by the Syrian masses who are fighting to survive their revolution?**

**Joseph Daher** - The pro western opposition had nothing to do in these mobilizations, they just condemned in these past months some actions of ISIS, but we should remember that the SNC hold nevertheless some responsibility in the spread of these groups or at least by their cover, by defending them groups in the beginning despite their reactionary and sectarian ideology, like Jabhat al Nusra instead of standing firmly on the principles of the Syrian revolution (Freedom, Dignity and no to sectarianism) and doing everything possible to develop the democratic components of the FSA and strengthening them by providing them with material and financial support. These groups just as the Syrian regime want to divide the Syrian people into sectarian and ethnic entities, while the Syrian revolution want to break the sectarian and ethnic division that the regime has tried to enforce on the people.

As explained above, the explosion was the result of the popular anger and the will to continue and deepen the revolutionary process. As a symbol of this, in a neighborhood of Aleppo on Saturday January 4, slogans used until today against the Assad regime were brandished against the jihadists such as *"our revolution is against all oppressors"* or *"the Syrian people will not submit."* Numerous calls have been made to call the next Friday (January 10 2014), the traditional day of demonstrations the Friday against Assad and Al Qaeda.

For those who saw the Islamist influence in the Syrian revolution as completely dominant or explaining the popular mobilizations can review their calculations and analyzes, as we have

repeatedly stated. The Syrian uprising is part of the dynamics of the other peoples uprisings and struggles for democracy and social justice. A third force , opposing both the tyranny of the Assad regime and Jihadists and Islamists reactionary groups , continues to grow and develop despite the media blackout around these groups, and even by some circles that present themselves as left who prefer stay in simplistic dichotomies of seculars vs. Islamists or by only analyzing Syria through their geopolitical analyzes which prevent them of understanding the revolutionary dynamics and the possibilities of radical change from below.

We the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria, which from the very beginning, despite its modest capacities, has not once faltered in its engagement with the revolution, calling for democracy and socialism, and we have not divided groups or individuals between secular and religious, but between those who want to continue the revolution and achieve its objectives and those who oppose it.

A banner crafted by revolutionary city of Kafranbel resumes very well the spirit of the Syrian revolution *"enemies are many ... the revolution is one... and continues"* Yes the revolution continues, despite the difficulties and multiple dangers, the Syrian people continues its path towards freedom and dignity sweeping all oppressors.

**Where do you think will the clashes between ISIS and other rebels lead to? What are the prospects for the Syrian revolution? How will it win?**

**Joseph Daher** - The recent event will definitely lead to a diminishing influence for ISIS at the benefit of different battalions of the FSA and of the IF. This might lead to renewal and deepening of popular mobilizations and self organizations. All sections of the counter revolutions eliminated is a positive point.

To answer the question of the prospects of the Syria revolution, we need to answer it at different levels.

On the international and regional level, the background has been the announcement of Geneva II "peace" conference and the Iranian USA agreement on the nuclear issue. Through these two international evens, we once more see that regional and international actors, despite differences and rivalries, are ready to agree and share a common position in front of popular revolutions and in our case the Syrian revolution. Geneva II conference has showed once more the will of on one side the USA, the West and the Gulf countries and Russia and Iran on the other side to reach a Yemeni solution to put an end to the Syrian revolution and in order to maintain the structure of the Assad regime, with or without it.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which is composed of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, issued a statement on November 28 2013 affirming the importance of strengthening international support for the Syrian opposition represented by the National Coalition, considered as the only legitimate representative of the Syrian opposition by the GCC, for participation in the Geneva 2 conference. It added that the conference should lead to "an agreement to put in place a limited timeframe to form a Syrian transitional government with full executive powers, in accordance with the statement of Geneva 1 on January 30 2012". No clear remarks were said on Assad's future, while the Syrian regime has repeated that Bashar Al Assad would be the president leading the "transition" in case of agreement with the opposition in the Geneva conference of January.

The GCC also declared that they hoped Iran's preliminary deal with world powers would lead to a comprehensive solution to its nuclear crisis. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif has visited Kuwait and Oman beginning of December, while United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, went to Tehran on end of November.

Iran's former president, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said he wanted better relations with Saudi Arabia in an interview with the Financial Times, while new president Hassan Rouhani declared that Improving relations with regional countries is a central plank of Iran's diplomatic policy.

In the same time, we have witnessed the common call made by Turkey and Iran on November 27 2013, for a ceasefire in Syria before peace talks in Geneva scheduled for January 22.

The various imperialists and regional powers, despite their rivalry, have a common interest in the defeat of the popular revolutions in the region, including in Syria, and in the maintaining of the status quo. Rivalries and differences between Russia and the USA, or Iran and the USA, have led many to describe Iran and Russia as anti imperialists powers, which is completely wrong on so many levels. Indeed we should not misunderstand imperialist rivalries on a world level between the USA, China and Russia as forms of anti imperialism in the case of China and Russia. They might have different tactical aims or choose to back separate actors, but they are all bourgeois powers that are and will always be strategically enemies of the popular revolution, solely interested in a the statu quo with a political context that enables them to accumulate their economic and political capital. The same can be said on the regional level between the different powers, whether Israel, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, etc... The Syrian revolution is a very good example of this case, where we can see officially international and regional states backing different actors and sides but with all ultimately opposing the objectives of the popular revolution in Syria. The Syrian popular movement has very well understood this by its refusal of Geneva II conference and these drawings portraying all the different international and regional actors of the Syrian revolution sitting on the same table with Bachar Al Assad to decide the future of Syria. In the same vein, they understand well the implications of the deal between the USA and Iran on Syria: to lead to a political transition respecting both interests while the popular movement's demands are ignored.

We have to understand as well that no regional and international power can be the friend of the Syrian revolution, but only the people in struggle in the region and elsewhere.

Regarding the ground level of the Syrian revolution, the self organization of the masses both in terms of civil and military actions must continue and coordination between the two deepen. The democratic components of the FSA must also be provided arms without political conditions.

The purely military victory has always been difficult, because of the structure of the army of the Syrian regime, built on sectarian, clientelist and tribal alliances and patronage while maintaining a very repressive and totalitarian system within the armed forces, making it difficult for mass defections, and Iranian and Russia material and financial support, in addition to the assistance given by sectarian military groups including Hezbollah. This is why we have always maintained that we need to combine the armed popular resistance and the "peaceful" or civil (strikes and other actions) actions that will allow the overthrow of the regime. This is one way to help bridge the current asymmetry in favor of the regime and destabilize more.

The asymmetry will nevertheless be difficult to overcome militarily as long as the popular and democratic forces in the Free Syria Army are not supported materially and financially.

In conclusion, there is no coming back to the era of Assad regime before the beginning of the revolution and to other forms of oppression. There is no alternative to the continuation of the revolution. One of the main slogans in Syria chanted by the protesters is "Rather death than humiliation". In the same time, we have to be clear that Islamists reactionary groups are a threat to

the revolution and for the edification of a democratic, social and non sectarian society in Syria. If they attack revolutionaries they must be condemned and challenged through different ways.

The role of the revolutionary is to be on the side and struggle with these popular organizations struggling for freedom and dignity and to radicalize as much as possible the popular movement towards progressive objectives, while fighting against opportunists and reactionary forces opposing popular class interests.

This is the line of the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria, which from the very beginning, despite its modest capacities, has not once faltered in its engagement with the revolution, calling for democracy and socialism. The party has struggled alongside the people and all democratic forces for the victory of this great popular revolution, just as it struggle for the formation of a socialist workers' party. We do not divide groups or individuals between secular and religious, but between those who want to continue the revolution and achieve its objectives and those who oppose it.

The building of the revolutionary party, alongside and inside the large popular movement, firm on the principles of the revolution, (democracy, social justice and no to sectarianism) is not a utopian dream or hope, it already exists, but it is mostly a political necessity to allow the continuation of the revolution and the achievement of its objectives.

We would like to end also by repeating that no solution can be achieved if the democratic and social issues are not dealt together, in other words social demands cannot be separated to democratic demands, neither subordinated, they go in hand in hand

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\* <http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2014/01/14/assad-and-isis-theyre-both-the-same/>

\* Original version on Marksist.org:

<http://www.marksist.org/roportajlar/13734-roportaj-suriyeli-devrimci-sosyalist-joseph-daher-esad-ve-i-sid-ikisi-de-ayni>

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## Footnotes

[1] We understand Islamists as representing a particular political ideology and political groups, we oppose the islamophobic discourse and propaganda by medias and some sections of the left considering every Muslim as an Islamist. The Islamic Front has a reactionary program, which notably demand a State based under Shariah law with a reactionary interpretation of religion, the promote a sectarian discourse and refuse democracy based on equality of all regardless of gender, religion, and ethnicity, etc... They also have been involved in massacres against Alawites civilians in August 2012 in Lattakia coastal area. They also have strong relations with the Gulf reactionary regimes.

This clarity of position regarding the Islamic Front does not mean we ignore these groups, there can be unity of actions on the military field especially between FSA and the Islamic Front against the regime and the jihadists, but no illusions should be put into them to achieve any objectives of the revolution. To see more details: available on ESSF (article 30862), [Dynamics and Prospects for the Syrian revolutionary process](#).