

Syria: Solidarity with Afrin, al-Ghouta, Idlib Against All Military Attacks

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We, the Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists oppose the various military attacks on Afrin, Idlib and Eastern Ghouta and support all the innocent civilians in Syria. . . There has been a consensus between all the international and regional powers on the necessity to liquidate the revolutionary popular movements initiated in Syria in March of 2011 . . .

Solidarity with Afrin against Turkish military intervention

Since January 20, 2018, Turkish military assisted by pro-Turkish Syrian opposition militia groups have launched a large scale air and ground offensive, dubbed « Operation Olive Branch » on Afrin province located in northwest Syria with a Kurdish majority population and controlled by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its People's Protection Units (YPG). At least 30 civilians have been killed since the beginning of the operation.

Afrin has welcomed many Internally Displaced Persons from other regions of the country which has led to a doubling of its population to 400,000 and 500,000, because it was relatively spared from the war and aggressions of the Assad's regime forces.

This attack comes after months of tensions and aggression by the Turkish military against Afrin. The Turkish army used as a pretext, an announcement by a military spokesman for the US-led global coalition against the Islamic State (IS) to build a 30,000-strong border force under the command of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) led by People's Protection Units (YPG). In Ankara's opinion, the US decision meant that the US-YPG partnership would not end with the collapse of the IS, as the Turkish government had hoped.

Ankara considers the People's Protection Units (YPG) and PYD in Syria , as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which the United States, the European Union and Turkey have labeled a terrorist organization.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the Afrin operation would be followed by another against Manbij. Erdogan also threatened any critical voices in Turkey against the « Operation Olive Branch », notably stating in reference to pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), « that wherever you go out on the streets our security forces are on your necks ». With the exception of the HDP, the rest of the main parties in Turkey, including the fascistic National Movement Party (known as MHP) and the Kemalist Republican People's Party (known as CHP), support Turkey's military intervention.

Despite a statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry expressing "concern" and calling on the

parties « to show mutual restraint », Moscow, which controls large large parts of Syrian air space, has actually given Turkey the green light for this invasion and has withdrawn its forces from the areas targeted by Turkish forces. Russian officials had demanded that the YPG hand over Afrin to the Syrian regime to « stop » the Turkish attacks on the region.

The USA has remained rather passive, only urging Turkey to exercise restraint and ensure that its military operations remain limited in scope and duration. At the same time, Russian, Iranian and Turkish diplomats met to prepare for the Syrian « National Dialogue Congress » to be held in Sochi, Russia on January 30, and seek to consolidate a so-called peace process in which the Assad regime's structures would be maintained.

The Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (known as the Etilaf), composed mostly of liberal and Islamic conservative and fundamentalist groups and personalities, have not only supported the Turkish military intervention and continued their previous chauvinist policies against the Kurds in Syria, but are also participating in this operation by calling on Syrian refugees in Turkey to join the Syrian armed opposition groups fighting in Afrin.

The current Turkish military operation against Afrin and the very recent failed Kurdish independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan, have shown that international and regional powers have no willingness to see any Kurdish national or autonomist aspirations come to fruition. It is evident that the previous support of Moscow and Washington for the YPG, and the YPG's support for the Russian air and military campaign alongside the Assad's regime launched at the end of September 2015, did not prevent Ankara's military aggression against Afrin.

More broadly, the Afrin operation reflects the weakness of all democratic and progressive actors in Syria in the face of the Assad regime and its allies' destruction of the Syrian revolution, and the consequent renewed power of this regime which has received acceptance by all International actors.

Solidarity with Idlib and al-Ghouta against the attacks by Assad's regime forces and its Russian ally

At the same time, we condemn the Assad regime's attacks on Eastern Ghouta and Idlib, areas which are supposedly considered "de-escalation zones" according to the Astana « peace » negotiations, led by Russia, Iran and Turkey.

Since mid-November 2017, the nearly 400,000 people in Eastern Ghouta have been subjected to airstrikes, shelling and bombardment on an almost daily basis by regime forces and its allies. At least 21 civilians have been killed by regime airstrikes and shelling of Eastern Ghouta between January 20 and 22. This brings the death toll to more than 200 civilians since the regime escalated its offensive against this area on December 29. According to the local Civil Defense, regime forces reportedly fired nine shells carrying suspected chlorine gas on Douma city on January 20 and injured 21 people. As a reminder, this region has been under siege by the Syrian regime and allied militias since 2013.

Opposition groups in al-Ghouta have also shelled various districts of Damascus, resulting in the killing and injuring of a dozen civilians these past few weeks.

In addition to this, following regime advances, in southern Idlib and northern rural Hama, over 200,000 civilians have been displaced in the past month. while more than 100 people were killed in the fighting.

In both Idlib and al-Ghouta, socialists need to stand in solidarity with the civilians against the authoritarian rule of Salafist and Jihadist movements, respectively Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam.

There has been a consensus between all the international and regional powers on the necessity to liquidate the revolutionary popular movements initiated in Syria in March of 2011 and to stabilize the murderous and authoritarian regime in Damascus with Bashar al-Assad at its head in the name of the « war on terror. » It is this consensus which has given the latest « carte blanche » for these crimes.

In the face of this counter-revolutionary consensus, what is desperately needed is solidarity between all (Arabs, Kurds and all other ethnic minorities) revolutionaries who are against the Assad regime and all the regional and international imperialist powers and support the struggles for social justice, women's rights and the rights of oppressed minorities.

The Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists supports the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria and in other countries. This does not mean that we take an uncritical stand on the policies of Kurdish parties leading these struggles, whether the PYD or the Kurdish Democratic Party or others, notably regarding violations of Human rights against civilians.

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