

No to U.S. War on Syria! No to Assad! Yes to a Democratic Syrian Revolution! Call and debates

Friday 30 August 2013, by [C.P.D.](#), [EISENSCHER Michael](#), [HARRISON Thomas](#), [LANDY Joanne](#), [McREYNOLDS David](#), [NOLAN Molly](#), [USLAW](#) (Date first published: 28 August 2013).

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Call Your Member of Congress Today and Say: No military attack on Syria!

The Obama Administration seems poised for a military attack on Syria. We must act NOW to do all we can to stop this dangerous and illegal action. Please contact your members of Congress today and tell them that a military attack on Syria is no solution to the crisis. They need to hear from us before it's too late!

Congress is in recess, so it is probably most effective to call Representatives in their District offices and U.S. Senators in their State offices. To find out their phone numbers, use this helpful Friends Committee on National Legislation guide. (Be sure to click contact, once you find your official's square)

Please let us know at cpd.igc.org if you have made your call.

CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY ROUNDTABLE ON THE SYRIAN CRISIS

<http://cpdweb.org/news/Syria-intro.shtml>

In June 2013 the Campaign for Peace and Democracy's co-directors issued a personal statement on the Syrian revolution [1]. At that time, we invited contributions to an on-line symposium, hoping to stimulate a vigorous debate over the issues raised by our statement. What follows are several pieces that in various ways oppose, support or supplement our position on Syria.

The symposium contributions were written before a large-scale poison gas attack with many casualties in the rebel-controlled Ghouta suburbs of Damascus on August 21, 2013. Likewise, they were all written before Washington's deployment of military forces to the region and its virtual

announcement that military action is forthcoming.

Whether or not it is definitively proven that the chemical weapons attack was carried out by the Syrian government (which in our view is very likely the case), we — along with all of the symposium participants — strongly oppose military intervention by the United States and its allies, for reasons explained in our symposium response. It's clear that whatever military measures the Obama administration may now adopt in Syria stem from a concern to rescue U.S. "credibility" as a global hegemonic power, not a genuine concern to defend the victims of Assad's brutality, a concern of which it has given little previous indication in the case of Syria or anywhere else. On the contrary, Washington continues to support and supply weapons to repressive governments in Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the world.

The first contribution, from Molly Nolan, characterizes the Syrian conflict as a civil war rather than a revolution, and argues against any of the forces, including secular democratic forces in the field, receiving arms. Instead, Nolan maintains that the only solution is negotiations between the Assad regime and its opponents, with no pressure for regime change from the Obama administration, and urges progressives not to take sides in the conflict.

Michael Karadjis, on the other hand, maintains that the Syrian conflict remains, fundamentally, a democratic revolt against dictatorship. While acknowledging the reactionary Islamist threat, he points to strong democratic resistance at the grassroots and argues that the Islamists are not yet in control. However, while defending the right of Syrian revolutionaries to obtain arms, he believes that the ongoing militarization of the conflict favors both Assad and the Islamists; therefore he thinks a ceasefire would be in the best interest of the revolution, allowing a revival of the mass movement that initiated the revolt against the regime.

David McReynolds highlights the ruinous history of U.S. "humanitarian intervention," citing the devastating wars on Iraq and Afghanistan. Like Nolan, McReynolds regards the fighting in Syria as a civil war, with Assad retaining significant popular support — though he rejects the idea that Assad and his regime are "socialists under assault." McReynolds is against all military aid to the rebels and calls for the U.S. to work with Russia to bring the warring parties to a peace conference.

Assaf Kfoury supports the Syrian revolution, but he thinks that any weapons from outside are more than likely to come with U.S. influence and interference attached, and that they will induce Russia, Iran and possibly China to increase the supply of weaponry to Assad. Kfoury, like Karadjis, looks to an internationally-supervised ceasefire and the coming Geneva-2 conference to bring at least a temporary respite to the violence.

Michael Eisenscher sends us the statement of U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW), along with additional commentary, calling on Congress and the Administration to send humanitarian aid rather than arms to Syria and to promote a political solution. Eisenscher also includes a link to a petition that USLAW signed along with other peace groups that opposes military intervention and opposes arming the rebels or creating a no-fly zone. It calls on the U.S. to focus on increasing humanitarian assistance through the UN and building active multilateral diplomacy with all involved parties for an immediate ceasefire without preconditions, a full arms embargo, and negotiations to end Syria's civil war.

Salameh Kaileh favors the revolutionaries receiving weapons where they can, and argues that all the outside powers, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have refused to arm the revolution in a way that would actually enable it to win. Instead, he says, they favor what they call a "political solution" that would consign Syria to Russia's sphere of influence.

Finally, we publish an interview “Imperialism, Sectarianism and Syria’s Revolution” with Joseph Daher, a member of the Syrian Revolutionary Left Current. Daher supports the Syrian revolution while arguing that reactionary forces like Jabhat al Nusra are being well-funded by some Gulf countries in order to transform the revolution into a sectarian war. Unlike many Western leftists, Daher insists that the Syrian conflict is not a proxy war and that Assad and the countries supporting him are not anti-imperialist. Instead he calls for solidarity with the revolutionary and democratic popular committees and organizations.

The symposium concludes with a response from the CPD co-directors, “No to U.S. War on Syria! No to Assad! Yes to a Democratic Syrian Revolution!”

Questions about the Harrison-Landy Statement on Syria, by Molly Nolan:

See below.

“[Syria: the question of arming the rebels](#)”, by Michael Karadjis: Available on ESSF (article 29596)

Syria: What Is To Be Done?, by David McReynolds: see below

Comments on “On Syria: A Personal Statement,” by Assaf Kfoury:

<http://cpdweb.org/news/Syria-Kfoury.shtml>

US Labor Against the War (USLAW) Statement on the Syrian Crisis, with a comment by Michael Eisenscher: See below.

“[The armed struggle and arming the Syrian opposition](#)”, by Salameh Kaileh: Available on ESSF (article 29597).

Interview with Joseph Daher, “[Imperialism, sectarianism and Syria’s revolution](#)”: Available on ESSF (article 29598)

Response from Thomas Harrison and Joanne Landy: “No to U.S. War on Syria! No to Assad! Yes to a Democratic Syrian Revolution!”: See below

[The links above will take you to all the contributions in our symposium.

We urge you to read them all. Below we include our concluding response.]

RESPONSE FROM THOMAS HARRISON AND JOANNE LANDY (Aug. 27, 2013)

No to U.S. War on Syria!

No to Assad!

Yes to a Democratic Syrian Revolution!

We would like to thank all of the contributors to the CPD symposium for helping to enrich the discussion of how peace activists and leftists should respond to the unfolding events in Syria, and to

the escalating threats of war on Syria by the United States and its allies.

Our fundamental disagreement with David McReynolds, Molly Nolan and Michael Eisenscher is that we believe it is essential to take sides in Syria. The Assad regime is extraordinarily cruel and tyrannical, and while it does retain support among sectors of the Syrian population, it is hated by the millions of Syrians, most likely the great majority, who have suffered under its rule. Although the fight against Assad has been complicated, and to a significant extent compromised, by the role of sectarian jihadists, it is still predominantly a popular democratic revolution. (See, for example, Amnesty International's Map of Non-Violent Activism in Syria.)

We agree with Michael Karadjis when he says that "the situation on the side of the revolution is still fluid, there is still struggle, the reactionary forces by no means dominate." Karadjis cites the reports of those on the ground who describe life in many areas of Syria controlled by the rebels, where authoritarian jihadists are not dominant, or where they are challenged by local people. He and others like Joseph Daher from the Syrian Revolutionary Left Current note that civic councils and local coordinating committees have sprung up in rebel-controlled areas — and when extremist political Islamists have tried to impose their doctrines on the population, they have often been resisted. Nonetheless, as we acknowledged in our initial statement, there is unquestionably a very real and growing threat of the Syrian revolution being hijacked by reactionary Islamists. Consequently we see an emerging three-cornered struggle with three contenders: supporters of the Assad regime, foreign and Syrian Islamists, and democratic forces resisting both.

David McReynolds rightly describes the retrograde aims of the U.S. government in Syria, the Middle East, and throughout the world, and argues that the left "cannot count on an imperial power to act with democratic and humanitarian concerns." Indeed, in our view, and in the view, it seems, of all of the contributors to the symposium, the sordid history of U.S. interventions in country after country stands as rejoinder to those who would hope that "this time" the United States military could play a positive role.

In our original statement, we said: "Consistent with our strong opposition to any kind of military intervention in Syria by the U.S., or other foreign powers, we also oppose providing air cover or establishing no fly zones. We do believe, however, that the democratic opponents of the Assad dictatorship have the right to get guns where they can, while resisting all attempts by those who provide arms to acquire political and military influence in return." We continue to defend this right, and we agree with Karadjis that merely receiving arms from foreign countries has never been the "final determinant" of a revolutionary movement's politics. But we also recognize that since none of the governments in the region or in the West actually favor a mass popular democratic victory, they are extremely reluctant to offer the democratic opposition significant weaponry. Moreover, like Karadjis, we do not call on the United States to arm the rebels, because we are unwilling to take responsibility for the way that the U.S. government will inevitably use any offer of weapons to attempt to manipulate the struggle and buttress its ongoing reactionary role in the Middle East.

We agree with Assaf Kfoury, Michael Karadjis, Salameh Kaileh and Joseph Daher that only the Syrian people can win their own freedom, and that the Syrian revolution has no real and reliable international support besides the revolutionary movements in the neighboring nations. This is why we remain extremely dubious about negotiations brokered by the big powers, such as the upcoming G-2 Conference. It may or may not be true, as Kfoury argues, that the current military imbalance is so overwhelmingly in favor of Assad that a brokered cease-fire is the only way to prevent further slaughter. But we should have no illusions. Russia and the U.S., if they can agree to use their "good offices" to resolve the Syrian conflict, will most likely seek a "Yemeni-type" solution — one which leaves the Assad regime intact, with or without Assad himself remaining in power.

The recent events in Egypt underscore the tremendous hurdles facing democratic revolutionary movements in the Middle East, but they also demonstrate the ongoing vital grassroots resistance to neoliberal, authoritarian governments that is the embryo of an egalitarian and democratic alternative. As long as these forces remain alive, they deserve our support and solidarity. What they do not need is a destructive, cynical and self-serving military strike on Syria by the U.S. and its allies.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HARRISON-LANDY STATEMENT ON SYRIA (July 21, 2013)

By Molly Nolan

Molly Nolan is a professor of modern European and transatlantic history at New York University and is a member of Brooklyn For Peace.

Syria is a humanitarian tragedy, a brutal civil war, and an escalating international political crisis. It seems to cry out for a response that goes beyond the rhetoric of solidarity with the increasingly beleaguered democratic forces and aid to the growing number of refugees on Syria's borders. Yet, as Tom and Joanne's thoughtful statement suggests, the interventions that have occurred have worsened the situation and those that are promised or threatened by the U.S. and EU will only produce more detrimental consequences. The most recent U.S. and EU intervention in Libya as well as the ongoing violence, oppression and instability that are Iraq and Afghanistan are evidence of that. Concerned as they are to promote democracy, an independent labor movement, and equality for women, sexual minorities, and religious and ethnic groups, they resist invoking the Responsibility to Protect norm of the UN to justify no fly zones and other forms of intervention as was done with Libya and as some urge with Syria.

Yet there are parts of their statement that make me uneasy. First, I worry about their insistence that while they oppose outside military intervention, they believe "the democratic opponents of the Assad dictatorship have the right to get guns where they can, while resisting all attempts by those who provide arms to acquire political and military influence in return." Those concerned with peace and future stability and reform of Syria should oppose any and all militarization of the conflict, even by forces whose goals we support. An influx of arms will simply prolong the conflict and encourage the opposition and their backers to avoid negotiations. There is no way to assure that it is only democratic forces that will buy or receive arms. The Saudis and the Qataris are willing to fund anyone who opposes Iran; they are not interested in al Qaeda gaining strength; they simply see Syria as a place to promote their interests elsewhere. Should radical Islamists win in Syria they will be no happier than the U.S. would be. Third, encouraging more arms to flow into Syria will further encourage the covert aid that the U.S. is already providing by means of the arms it supplies to its Saudi and Qatari allies. We are after all the world's largest arms producer and supplier, as part of having the world's largest military budget by far. Encouraging any militarization means in effect encouraging U.S. involvement.

Second, the statement should have opposed all outside efforts to dictate the nature of the Syrian government and who heads it. It is not enough to condemn Russia, China, Iran, and Hezbollah for supporting Assad. It should also condemn the Obama Administration's insistence, and that of France

and Britain, that Assad needs to go. There is a long history of the U.S. calling for and often overtly or covertly engineering regime change. The results have not worked to promote democracy, equality, peace or freedom.

Third, the only solution to the conflict in Syria will come through negotiation. Much as we dislike Assad, his regime does have the support of a portion of the population. That is part of the reason the conflict has been so prolonged. The negotiations must be among Syrians, for only they have the right to determine the state and society they want.

Finally, I wish I was as confident as Tom and Joanne about the strength of secular and democratic forces in Syria. In part it is that there is so little reliable information about what is happening within the Syrian opposition. Syria may be a continuation of the Arab Spring, but as we have seen, that complex series of uprisings have themselves proven enormously complex and contradictory in their still provisional outcome. Prolonged armed conflict creates polarization along several axes and erodes the forces of moderation. The divisions within the Free Syrian Army are one indication of this, the controversies about which side (or both) have used sarin gas is another.

SYRIA: WHAT IS TO BE DONE? (Aug. 7, 2013)

By David McReynolds

David McReynolds is a member of the Socialist Party, Democratic Socialists of America, and Committee of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism. Now retired, he was on staff of War Resisters League for nearly 40 years.

We know that the war in Syria—which is a civil war, not a revolution—is profoundly tragic, with over 100,000 dead, with tens upon tens of thousands of people fleeing into neighboring countries. I'm baffled that the left seems in confusion. I know there are some on what might be called the "hard left" (I'd be inclined to call it the thick headed left) who see Assad and his regime to be socialists under assault, including, by one recent statement, by Israel. (I have no idea what Israel will do—its foreign policy is brutal and clumsy but not usually insane—I doubt very much the Israeli generals, much as they may hate Assad, want to risk trading a relatively peaceful border for one under the control of extreme Islamists). And I'm aware that another part of the left seems to feel that we must intervene (a small segment of the left, but one we heard from on Libya as well).

At least I know how little I know about Syria. I have never been there, nor made a study of it. (Unlike Libya, about which I did know something, and where I think US/NATO policy was dishonest). I know Assad has run a brutal regime. I also know that he does have some genuine popular support (my source for this is the *New York Times*). And I know that at this time, the rebels are in retreat and Assad is gaining the upper hand in a military sense. It may well be that Syria cannot be "put back together," that a Rubicon has been crossed in terms of bloodshed. I know there are deep religious divisions in Syria (not, I think, the cause of the trouble, but, once the trouble begins, then, as with Iraq, they take on a terrible life of their own).

Most of all I don't think there is anything the left can or should do except profoundly and totally oppose any military aid to the rebels, and give all possible support to negotiations. Some things to keep in mind: Lebanon had a similarly bloody civil war which continued until it finally simply ran out

of steam. The US had a civil war which, considering how small our population was, took a terrible toll. More Americans lost their lives in our civil war than were lost in the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War all put together!!!

We do know (even if, as with me, we don't know much) that there were some decent, secular, democratic forces involved in the original uprising against Assad. We can seek to maintain contact with them, even as we categorically refuse to send military aid, either overtly or covertly. (Here, as so often, I would urge those who feel we need to send military aid to find a way to go there and join the fight—I'm sure the rebels would rejoice in a few English speaking radicals willing to carry guns, and I'd suggest that those in the hard left who think Assad must be defended to take similar action—put their bodies where their slogans are).

I'm disturbed by the shallow level of some of the discussion. We have heard of possible use of poison gas by Assad—though of late that charge seems to have lost steam. [see postscript below-eds] For Americans to raise the question of chemical war is in poor taste, since we were teachers in this area, not only with tear gas, but with the enriched uranium littering the battle fields of Iraq, and the terrible toll agent orange took of the Vietnamese (and of Americans serving in that war).

It is in particularly poor taste for the Americans to raise this, given the "covert" role we played in helping Saddam use poison gas against the Kurds and the Iranians.

And speaking of Saddam, and bloodshed, and the need to intervene for "humanitarian reasons" in Syria, I do not remember one word from the White House during the terrible war Iraq launched against Iran and which took the lives of a half million young men on each side over the course of that war. On the contrary, the US was delighted to see Iran under military attack.

As a pacifist I would not fight in this or any war—some would say a cheap way out. But I can distinguish between and among wars. If ever there was a just war, it was that of the Vietnamese people against the US, and if ever there might have been reason for a Security Council decision to establish a no-fly zone, it would have been there, against the US. I think all of us who are now old would say the Spanish Civil War was also a just war, and we salute those who fought there in defense of the Republic. We can say, of the Israeli attacks on Gaza and on Lebanon, that while they were not attacking secular, democratic forces, they were engaged in barbaric attacks on civilian populations, and involved the use of white phosphorus. I'll take the "humanitarians" in the State Department seriously when they speak out in defense of the Palestinians.

But most of all—granting how terrible this war is, and how unjust it is for its impact on the civilians—have we not learned by now that one cannot count on an imperial power to act with democratic and humanitarian concerns? Have we forgotten how, in Indochina, the US sold out the Viet Minh, with whom we had been working, and turned that area back over to the colonial control of France?

No military aid to the rebels. A curse on all who send in weapons, whether Russia, Iran, or Hezbollah or, as some seem to forget, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States which have been so eager to fund the rebels but are totally opposed to democratic and secular movements in their own territory. What has happened to that part of the left which seems to think the US has a positive role to play in these areas?

Let me close by noting of the voices in the State Department for some form of humanitarian "aid" that they represent an armed and oppressive state which invaded Iraq without reason, has laid waste to Afghanistan and has given Israel unconditional support. They have lost the right to speak in moral terms. Silence would become them very well. Or, at the least, serious work with Russia for an

international conference to bring the warring parties to the table.

POSTSCRIPT August 23, 2013

First things first. Assad should immediately let in the UN team to inspect the areas under contention.

Second, we must condemn the use of chemical warfare by any nation, particularly the use of poison gas.

Third, points one and two cannot obscure the fact the US has been a leading user of chemical weapons in Vietnam, in Iraq, and in Afghanistan (though not poison gas) and that the US supported Saddam Hussein during the time he used poison gas against the Kurds and in his battle with Iran. The US is not working from a moral high ground—nor is France nor is Britain.

Fourth, the fact we have contempt for the record of Western powers on these matters cannot obscure the need for Assad to permit in UN teams to inspect the areas immediately.

I think all of us would continue to demand an end of any foreign military intervention, and support for the proposed international conference seeking a political solution—dim as the hopes for that may be.

US LABOR AGAINST THE WAR STATEMENT ON SYRIA, WITH A COMMENT BY MICHAEL EISENSCHER

By Michael Eisenscher

Michael Eisenscher is National Coordinator of U.S. Labor Against the War.

U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW) has focused most of its attention and resources on the Iraq and Afghan Wars, and building the New Priorities Network and Jobs-Not-Wars Campaign to shift resources from the bloated Pentagon budget to meet urgent social needs.

The crisis in Syria, however, is of such import and urgency that USLAW's steering committee and officers felt compelled to speak out.

USLAW makes the following points:

Sending more arms to Syria is literally like pouring gasoline onto a fire. It will only deepen the suffering and increase the casualties among the Syrian people. It will prolong the conflict, not end it. It will inevitably result in arms falling into the hands of groups and individuals who will use them against us (blowback). It will deepen hatred of the U.S. by Arab and Moslem people. It will destabilize the region and risks escalating the conflict into a regional war. It will violate the U.N. Charter and international law. It will ultimately lead to the commitment of U.S. armed forces to what is a civil war. It will lead to more cuts to social services and domestic spending as it drains funds into another bottomless pit of military conflict.

The security and safety of the American people can only be undermined by another military intervention in the Middle East, whether direct or indirect.

There should be no US military intervention in any form;
Send diplomats and humanitarian aid not weapons;
There is no military solution;
Create conditions that allow for a political resolution;
All the parties need to be at the table;
The Syrian people, not the U.S., Saudis, Qataris, Iranians, Turks, Russians, Israelis or any others, should decide who should govern Syria.
What will strengthen the security and safety of the American people, and serve our real national interests, will be using the funds now siphoned off by the military-industrial complex to create stable living wage jobs, provide universal healthcare, put more teachers into classrooms and rebuild our schools, support college students instead of encumbering them with debt, rebuild the nation's infrastructure, help homeowners and renters instead of banks, and reduce our carbon footprint by creating alternative sustainable sources of energy to slow the process of global warming.

With these ends in mind, USLAW joined with Friends Committee on National Legislation, Institute for Policy Studies, Just Foreign Policy, Peace Action, Peace and Justice Resource Center, United for Peace and Justice, and Women's Actions for New Directions to launch a petition to the President and leadership of Congress. We encourage all those who share our concerns to sign it and get others to do so too. The petition is available at <http://bit.ly/no-syria-arms>.

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August 7, 2013

Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 29017), [On Syria - A personal statement by CPD Co-Directors](#).