

The situation in Syria: Open letter to the British Stop the War Coalition (STWC), or real solidarity is needed!

Sunday 29 November 2015, by [DAHHER Joseph](#) (Date first published: 24 May 2012).

Contents

- [The Syrian popular movement](#)
- [Opposition](#)
- [Position of the Syrian and](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

On 15 March 2012, the Syrian revolution “celebrated” its first year with more killings and repression. The death at this date toll in the regime crackdown has exceeded 10,000 martyrs, while there are more than 35,000 injured, over 65,000 missing and more than 212,000 prisoners. The regime’s repression has continued since then.

The determination of the Syrians in their struggle against this criminal dictatorship is nevertheless doubted by some left-wing currents around the world, and even among some comrades in the Stop the War Coalition who have even been relaying the Syrian regime propaganda.

This is why I am writing this open letter! I agree with them on the issue of refusing foreign military intervention, but I feel that their lack of support to the Syrian popular movement and its struggle for freedom, social justice and true independence is a huge mistake, not to say anything else.

I acknowledge the important role played by STWC in opposing imperialist wars in the Middle East — from Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, Lebanon 2006, Palestine 2009, to threats of war against Iran and Syria today.

I am concerned that a section of the leadership has fallen for the conspiracy theory of the Syrian regime. They repeat regime propaganda that describes our revolution as a conspiracy by Western imperialists and its allies led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which are opposed to the “anti-imperialist and pro-resistance” Syrian regime.

The coalition has opposed the various wars that are claimed to be part of the “War on Terror”. It has organised large demonstrations calling for the invading troops to leave Iraq, for the UK to halt reductions in the civil liberties of its citizens — including the right to protest and a free trial — and for a reduction in racism in the UK. I salute the work of STWC, and acknowledge it.

In relation to Syria, I agree on the need to oppose to foreign military intervention, but from all sides. This mean not only condemning the foreign interventions of the West and its regional allies, but also the foreign interventions of Russia and Iran directly assisting the regime in its repression.

I agree with the STWC to oppose the imperialist’ agenda of their government, but that does not mean to describe the Syrian uprising as a western imperialist conspiracy. It is possible to oppose

foreign intervention and bring support to the popular movement.

Furthermore I believe the principle stand of the StW should remain “no to foreign military intervention and the right of Syrian people to determine their own future.” This has to be the basis on which all those opposed to imperialism can work together. The Coalition must not become the voice of the regime, as this would undermine the unity of all those who, whatever other disagreements, want to pull together to stop the drive to war, intervention and interference.

Sami Ramadani, who is a member of STW steering committee, has declared and written numerous times [1] that the revolution has been taken over by the West and regional allies against the anti imperialist Syrian regime. He adds that today “It is clear that the current alternative to the Syrian dictators, in the absence of a strong unified democratic movement, is bloody sectarian strife, orchestrated by a motley collection of sectarian forces, mercenaries and former regime figures, such as Paris-based billionaire and former vice-president Abdulhalim Khaddam and Saudi-based billionaire and Bashar’s uncle, Rifa’at al-Assad.” The Syrian regime has a similar speech: I or the Chaos!

According to Ramadani, [2] “We have to recognise that the imperialist-backed Arab counter-revolution has, in the short term, regained the initiative and is on the offensive” in the Syrian revolution. In his opinion “The Qatari-owned, poisonously sectarian Al Jazeera and Western media distort events in Syria. Close examination shows that, as in Libya, pro-Nato factions have captured the initiative. These factions are dominant in the Syrian National Council (SNC) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA)”.

He also describes the following way the Syrian revolutionary process: “The FSA was founded in and is logistically backed by Turkey, a Nato member. Lebanon’s US-French-Israeli allies, pro-US Iraqi forces, Jordan, Libyan terrorists and Nato Special Forces are all assisting counter-revolution in Syria. Shaken by the uprisings, Qatari and Saudi sheiks provide funding for sectarian Muslim Brotherhood leaders and Salafi clerics. They target minorities in an attempt to fragment Syria and plunge the country into sectarian civil war”. It is the regime which has targeted minorities and any Syrian citizens opposing its rule.

He ends with this sentence: “Most of the left and anti-imperialist democrats in Syria are keenly aware of this”. This last sentence, as the whole analysis, is actually not true as most of the leftists, anti imperialists democrats current are today in the street of Syria or in exile struggling against the authoritarian regime.

He reiterated all this in a conference on April 4 in a conference in ULU, London.

The Iraqi Democrats Against Occupation (formerly Iraqi Democrats Against War and Sanctions) is an Iraqi political organisation originally founded to oppose United States-sponsored economic sanctions. It has now turned its focus to the current occupation of Iraq, calling for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops and the institution of a democratic government.

In STWC, they want to denounce the Syrian revolution. Sabah Jawad in his speech on a STWC demonstration on 29 January in front the US embassy opposed foreign interventions but did not say a word in support of the Syrian popular movement in its struggle against Assad dictatorship.

Worse still, Sabah Jawad started to imply that Saudi Arabia and Qatar were the ones controlling the movement and they had sectarian interests in addition to put an end to the “resistant” Syrian regime.

The famous George Galloway has also been a source of debate. He has declared in 2005 Assad as

'the last Arab ruler', and in July 2011 "Bashar Assad wants reform and change, to realize the aspirations of his people," he said in the interview, which was quoted in the official Syrian news agency Sana. "They are trying to pressure Syria and President Assad because of the good things that he did, such as supporting Palestinian and Lebanese resistance and rejecting to surrender to Israel."

Beginning of 2012, he started to change slightly his speeches by criticizing the Syrian regime for its repression, saying that Bachar Al Assad has to leave, and said there are sections of Syrian people who have legitimate demands. He nevertheless still spend more time speaking about the conspiracy against the "anti imperialist" Syrian regimes from western governments and its regional allies which are now controlling the popular movement according to him.

George Galloway also accuses of the opposition if being sectarian and to frighten the minorities in Syria. He drew many times attention to the fact that people in the opposition are shouting 'Allah Akbar!'. So according to him we have to be careful.

The Syrian popular movement

The Syrian revolution is a popular and national uprising, bringing together all the communities across the country. The slogans of the demonstrators such as "We are all Syrians, we are united" are repeated constantly. In many demonstrations we have seen banners saying "No to sectarianism". The movement has united people, just as Egyptians and Tunisians united during their revolutions. No unity is possible under a dictatorship, which has developed a strategy of fomenting fear between sects. The popular movement in Syria is struggling for social solidarity that transcends sectarian and ethnic divisions.

In addition to being completely undemocratic, Syria is also far from being an anti-imperialist state struggling against the US and Israel, as its rulers claim. Imperialist powers are actually not interested in the fall of Assad regime — which has avoided direct confrontation with Israel for nearly four decades, while repressing radical and progressive parties and popular movements. United States and NATO officials have actually said that the North Atlantic alliance has no intention of intervening militarily to quell violence in Syria on May 21 2012.

The Palestinian refugees of Syria have increasingly been participating in the revolution among their Syrians brothers and sisters. They have suffered from the regime's repression, with more than 40 martyrs and hundreds arrested by security forces. Palestinians in the occupied territories and in 48 territories or Historic Palestine have organised many demonstrations and actions in support of the struggle of the Syrian people.

It is the Syrian people who have pressured the regime to support resistance in the past. It is the Syrian population who welcomed Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi refugees when their countries were attacked and occupied by imperialist powers. A victory for the Syrian Revolution will open a new resistance front against the imperialist powers, while its defeat will strengthen them.

Opposition

The SNC is not representative of the Syrian people and support for it inside Syria is decreasing every day. Defections are happening slowly inside the SNC and ex-members are condemning its links with foreign powers. The SNC has been the target of protesters and of various groups struggling on the ground.

Many other groups are present in Syria and are struggling against the regime, including the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (a group inside the country, gathering together nationalists, leftists and Kurds), and the Watan Coalition gathering around 17 leftist political groups and organization, including the Syrian revolutionary left. Kurdish activists are also very present in the revolutionary process.

The main organizers of demonstrations, civil disobedience and campaign of strikes are nevertheless the coordination committees inside the country such as the Local Coordination Committees (LCCs), grassroots activist networks helping organize and document protests (including through a daily newsletter for the international and Arabic media), the General Commission of the Syrian Revolution, Communist coordination committees and other local youth committees inside Syria such as rally “hashad” and “helem”. They are the real force of resistance and we found representatives of all the various sects in it. This is why they have been the main targets of the regime since the beginning of the uprising.

This latter reaffirms the importance a genuine anti imperialists struggle and a real struggle for the Palestinian cause, and not hypocritical rhetoric like the regime.

Position of the Syrian and Lebanese revolutionary left

The position of the revolutionary left in Syria and Lebanon has been the following: Yes to the victory of the revolution! No to foreign intervention! This includes Western governments’ one side, and Iran and Russian on the other.

Conclusion

As a sympathiser of the work and activism of the STWC, I demand and suggest the organisation to stand therefore before its principles: no to foreign military intervention and yes to the right of Syrian people to determine their own future. This means in other words to support the struggle of the Syrian People against a criminal dictatorship, which has launched a war on its people regardless of their sects, while condemning foreign interventions from all sides in Syria. To allow people adopting the official discourse of the regime to narrate the events in Syria go against the principles of STWC and weaken the coalition. In addition I personally consider this behaviour as an insult to the Syrian people and their struggle to build a new Syria.

Victory to the Syrian Revolution and glory for our martyrs

Joseph Daher, May 24, 2012

P.S.

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<https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2012/05/24/open-letter-to-the-stop-the-war-coalition-stwc-or-real-solidarity-is-needed/>

Footnotes

[1] <http://stopwar.org.uk/index.php/usa-war-on-terror/1402-sami-ramadani-why-i-will-join-the-no-t-o-nato-protest-on-19-may> and <http://stopwar.org.uk/index.php/middle-east-and-north-africa/1376-syria-and-the-broken-arab-spring>

[2] <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=27876>