

Syria, Alep: Letter to a “comrade” who insists on justifying the unjustifiable

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“Comrade”,

For several weeks now I’ve been saying to myself that I’m going to write to you, and the tragic events of Aleppo and your reaction to them, and sometimes your non-reaction, is what eventually persuaded me that the time had come to address you.

Not necessarily with the aim of convincing you; I believe that unfortunately it is already too late. But this way at least you would have been warned and you will not be able to claim that you did not know.

In the name of anti-imperialism?

The city of Aleppo has been victim of a massacre, of a real carnage, which one cannot help comparing with other martyred cities like Srebrenica, Grozny, Fallujah, as well as Warsaw and Guernica, or the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Chatila.

The direct testimonies pouring from the city, coming from “ordinary” Syrians and not only from members of armed groups, are eloquent, a fortiori when they are accompanied by photographs or videos. Words and images that tell about the distress, the impotence, the horror.

But you, “comrade,” have done your utmost in these last few days—if this exercise can be considered as having anything to do with a virtue—to explain that we should not engage with the inhabitants of Aleppo and that there was no need to denounce the bombing of which they are victims, nor to denounce the abuses committed by the troops on the ground during the “liberation” of the city. In other words, you have come to explain us that we should not take a clear and determined position against the planned massacre perpetrated by the dictatorial regime of Bashar al-Assad and its allies, with Russia and Iran at the forefront.

If I address you, “comrade”, it is because in the past we have shared numerous battles, especially—but not only—the fight for the rights of the Palestinian people. Because I thought that, despite our differences, we had common principles. Indeed, I have nothing to say to the pro Putin and/or pro Assad right and far-right, who are unambiguous in their support of authoritarian regimes

in the name of shared “values”, and who have never bothered to appear as wanting to build real solidarity with oppressed peoples.

But you, “comrade”, you arrogate to yourself “progressive”, “anti-imperialist”, “socialist”, “communist”, and even “revolutionary” virtues. And in the name of these virtues you attempt to convince us that for the time being we shouldn’t resolutely position on the side of the besieged and massacred people of Aleppo, and that tomorrow we shouldn’t position on the side of the rest of the already besieged and soon massacred Syrian cities.

Which is not, you will admit, the least of the paradoxes.

– “The bad guys are not necessarily the ones we believe”

My understanding was that what constituted the common genetic heritage of the anti-imperialist left was to be on the side of the peoples crushed by the imperialist states and their allies. My understanding was that in this genetic heritage, that we seemed to share, we did not compromise with international solidarity. And I had hoped that, despite your sometimes more than ambiguous positions on the Syrian tragedy, the martyrdom of Aleppo would bring you back to reason, and home.

But no. You’re stubborn. You persist with trying to explain that one cannot take sides with the massacred population in Aleppo.

You persist with trying to explain that “things are not so simple”. You persist with trying to explain that in this “war” there is no “good guys on the one hand and bad guys on the other”, and that we need to keep a cool head and not succumb to the easy.

Because it’s pretty clear, “comrade”, you don’t succumb to the easy. Never. You propose us a complex, very elevated and nuanced analysis, which reads somewhat like this: “No, Assad is not a democrat, and the countries supporting him are no models either. But be careful: the self-proclaimed Syrian rebellion is mostly composed by forces coming from fundamentalist, even jihadist Islam which are remote-controlled and armed by reactionary regimes like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, even by the Western sponsors of the latter, particularly the US and France”

Conclusion: “Careful, the bad guys are not necessarily the ones we believe”

– The Syrian people, you know?

The first problem of your analysis, “comrade”, is that it “forgets” an essential actor: the Syrian people. Indeed, you seem to “forget” that the point of departure of the “events” in Syria is not a Saudi, US, Qatari or Turkish intervention. Not even a Russian one. The point of departure of all this is that in March 2011 hundreds of thousands of Syrian men and women rose up against a dictatorial and predatory regime, like they did in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Libya. And if Assad and his thugs had not decided to brutally repress the uprising, with more than 5.000 killed and tens of thousands of detentions during 2011, they too would have fallen under popular pressure.

And we are talking about 2011, year in which, remember “comrade”, you were excited about the other uprisings in the region. “The people want the fall of the regime”, do you remember? You may have even chanted it in the streets of a French city, you who are so fond of freedom, social justice and democracy. In Syria it was chanted too, along with the same economic, social and political

demands as in the other countries of the region that were touched by the uprising, and Ryad, Doha, Paris or Washington had nothing to do with it. If you are so interested in the Syrian question, you must know that every time there has been a truce in recent years, the demonstrations resumed. That without the intervention of Iran, then of Russia, the regime would have fallen, under the pressure of the Syrian people, not a few thousand “foreign fighters” —who arrived, by the way, long after the regime killed thousands of unarmed Syrians, and brought tens or even hundreds of “jihadists” out of prison. Have you ever wondered why?—And, yes, the roots of the Syrian “crisis” are indeed the popular protest against a clan, and the response of the latter: destroy everything rather than lose its power and perks.

Unless you want to imply that from the beginning Syrians were “manipulated” by Western countries, that all this is basically a story about hydrocarbons, and that the Syrian uprising was remotely guided from outside by powers that need only to press a button for populations to rise. But I dare not even think so: you are not one of those who believe that Arabs are so foolish that they are not able to think for themselves and that when they begin to mobilize and claim “social justice”, even if they risk losing their lives, it is necessarily because they are manipulated by Westerners who think only of “hydrocarbons”.

Right, “comrade”?

Rocket launcher against aviation

The second problem with your analysis, “comrade”, is that you put on the same level, on one side the “support” provided by Russia and Iran to Assad and on the other the “support” brought by the United States, France, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies to the Syrian opposition forces. You try to make us believe that there wouldn’t be an overwhelming military superiority of the Assad regime and its allies and that, after all, to resume, barely altering it, a formula in vogue in a country bordering Syria, “Assad has the right to defend himself”.

But dare you really compare, on one side, the thousands of Iranian “military advisers” and armament, the thousands of Hezbollah fighters and, above all, the Russian air force (as well as the vehicles and heavy weapons supplied by Russia, the 2nd largest military power in the world) that support a state and a regular army, and, on the other, small arms, rocket launchers and anti-missile launches provided or financed by the Gulf monarchies or Turkey and small arms, rocket launchers, a few anti-tank weapons and communications systems and night vision devices provided, by the drip, by the United States and France?

Do you know that what the Syrian opposition forces have been asking for since the beginning are anti-aircraft missiles, in order to defend themselves against the planes of Putin and Assad’s death, and that it is the United States that have systematically vetoed the delivery of such weapons? Do you know that at the beginning of 2014, after the failure of the “Geneva 2” conference, the Saudis for the first time suggested to deliver missile launchers to the Syrian opposition forces, and that the United States opposed it and that they have not changed position since then? The United States, which did not want, and does not want, that these weapons fall “into the wrong hands”, and above all does not wish for the Syrian state apparatus to be destroyed because they have, contrary to others, drawn the balance sheets of their brilliant intervention in Iraq.

Ask yourself the following question: where are the terrible weapons of the opposition? Do you seriously think that Assad could have bombed entire neighborhoods from helicopters flying low if Syrian opponents had disposed of real armament?

And do you remember that last May the Russian embassy in Great Britain, which must be well informed and which, if it had proofs of the great armament of the opponents of Assad, would exhibit them, was limited to tweeting images extracted from a video game (!) to “prove” that the Syrian opposition forces were receiving chemical weapons?

So, please, let's be serious!

Who is destroying Syria?

The third problem with your analysis, “comrade”, is that you simply forget a fundamental element: the facts. For you will always be able to tell me that what I have just written is impossible to prove, even if it is the main actors of this “non-support” and the “non-supported” who have testified to it, and who continue to do so. Because, perhaps, after all, they are fierce liars.

But if you absolutely want proof, just open your eyes and ask yourself this simple question: how could Syria have been destroyed? When you comment on the images of devastated cities saying that there is “violence on both sides,” you hide a detail: who possesses the weapons necessary to cause a destruction of such magnitude?

To put it another way: who can carry out bombings? Where are the planes of the Syrian opposition forces? Where are their tanks? Hidden underground, like the super-powerful army of Saddam Hussein that threatened the whole world? How many planes have been destroyed by the Syrian opposition forces? Are you aware that in 2013, when they knocked down two helicopters, it was such a rare event that they celebrated it with great pomp and spread images of their “feat” everywhere? Two helicopters! At that time, I could not stop thinking about the people of Gaza celebrating the accidental fall of an Israeli drone

The “coalition” led by the United States intervenes militarily, you object. But can you give me a list of the bombings carried out by this coalition against the armed forces of the Assad regime or against the armed forces that support it? No, do not waste your time searching, because I inform myself daily from reliable sources: according to the Damascus regime and the media that relay its communication, sources that can hardly be suspected of wanting to conceal this type of bombing, it has happened ... twice. The first time was in December 2015 (4 dead), in the Deir ez-Zor region, the “coalition” denied having targeted the Syrian army and claimed that it had bombed Daech. The second time in September 2016 (between 50 and 80 deaths according to the sources), near the airport of Deir ez-Zor, this time the “coalition” recognized having bombarded the positions of the regime and presented official apologies to Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin.

In summary, and unless I'm somewhere mistaken (no one is infallible), the “coalition”, which claims about 5,000 “strikes” on Syria, has twice targeted the Assad regime since the beginning of its bombing campaign in 2014, and in one of those cases it has “apologized” for it. Therefore, please note down: “The real military operations carried out by the “coalition” targeted Daech and other “jihadist” groups, not Assad and his allies”.

Finally, some “preventive” remarks

There are many other problems with your analysis, “comrade”, I do not wish to take up any more of your time. Indeed, for having often had the opportunity to discuss verbally with you these “analysis problems” by confronting your “geopolitics” and your “anti-imperialism” with the facts and the actual chronology of events, I know you do not like them very much: the facts. They are really too

stubborn.

For it is much easier to come to provoke or to stir up trouble via posts/comments on Facebook or discussion forums than to take the time to have a somewhat precise and reasoned exchange.

So in case you are still tempted to succumb to the easy and want to play this little game, I present to you a few “preventive” remarks:

- Before telling me that I defend the same positions as the United States, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, BHL or some other “cumbersome companions”, remember that if you reason in this way you defend on your side the same positions as Russia, Iran, Marshal Sissi, François Fillon or Marine Le Pen, and ask yourself if that’s a good argument.

- Before telling me that since 2011 Israel has bombed fifteen times positions of the Assad regime, and that those who are against Assad are therefore with Israel, remember that last June Putin declared, at the end of a meeting with Netanyahu with whom he had just signed several trade agreements, the following: *“We have evoked the need for joint efforts in the fight against international terrorism. In this regard, we are allies. Both countries have significant experience in matters of fight against extremism. We will therefore strengthen our contacts with our Israeli partners in this area”*. And ask yourself if that’s a good argument.

- Before telling me that the Syrian rebellion appealed to the Western countries to receive weapons and to benefit from a substantial, especially aerial, military support and that this necessarily hides something, remember that the Kurdish forces that you admire so much—rightly so—since they rejected Daech in Kobane have done exactly the same thing, and they have obtained this support, to the extent that they publicly thanked the United States for their support, and ask yourself if that’s a good argument.

- Before telling me that the Syrian rebellion, even though one might at first have been sympathetic to it, is now confiscated by reactionary forces stemming from political Islam, and that some of these forces do not hesitate to attack civilians or, a variation on the same theme, that it is really tragic to bomb civilians but that it’s because terrorists hide among them when they do not use them as human shields, remember that this is the speech of those who want to justify the campaigns of deadly bombing on Gaza, and ask yourself if that’s a good argument.

- Before telling me that the Syrian insurgents are “objective allies” of Daech, remember that Daech was driven out of Aleppo at the beginning of 2014 by those who are now being massacred by Assad, then think about the concept of “objective ally”, and ask yourself if that’s a good argument. You can also reconsider, if you are not convinced, what I mentioned above about the real targets of the coalition bombing, and ask yourself a second time if the blow of the “objective ally” is a good argument.

- Finally, before telling me that those who denounce Assad and Putin “forget” to denounce the massacres committed by the great Western powers and their allies, keep in mind that of those who mobilize for Aleppo, we are many who also mobilized for Gaza, against military intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or elsewhere, and that we do not renounce, contrary to you who chose not to be on the street last night to denounce the current butchery [December 14 in Paris], to our political consistency, ideals and anti-imperialism. And ask yourself if that’s a good argument.

* * *

This is, “comrade”, what I wanted to tell you. The tone is not very pleasant, I agree, but it is not

much compared to the indifference, sometimes even contempt, that you display towards the martyrdom of Aleppo.

Do whatever you want with this letter, and of course you have the right to continue be complacent in your short-sighted “geopolitical” vision and your Pavlovian “anti-imperialism” while the Syrians crash under Putin’s and Assad’s bombs before your eyes.

We are not talking about an exercise of rhetoric on Facebook through interposed comments, but of thousands, tens of thousands of lives. We are not talking about a discrepancy between us about the appreciation of this or that event, but about your complicit silence or your miserable contortions in the face of one of the greatest tragedies of our time. We are not talking about a simple political disagreement, but a real rupture.

I don’t know when we will talk next time, “comrade”. But what I know is that if you persist, and unfortunately I think that is what you are going to do, there will not even be quotation marks anymore, for there will be no more comrade.

I leave you with Che, who has something to say to you: *“Above all, try always to be able to feel deeply any injustice committed against anyone in any part of the world. It is the most beautiful quality of a revolutionary.”*

15 December 2016

PS: No, I did not put any footnotes. It is not my style not to mention references, but you will probably have understood that it is voluntary. Because you are very good at doing research on the internet (and elsewhere?), you and I know very well that you will be able to find all the sources used here *[Many of them available on this website – ESSF]*.

Julien Salingue

P.S.

* Translation IVP.

* Translated into English from Spanish and French by Rafaela Apel