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U.S. anti-war movement should stay focused on getting U.S. out of Syria



Oct. 20 – The author visited Syria in 2014 and 2015 in small International Action Center solidarity delegations. At that time, no road in the country was safe and one-third of the population was displaced — taking refuge inside Syria or in surrounding countries. The schools, mosques, churches and community centers in Damascus were packed with tens of thousands of desperate refugees. Everywhere, including downtown Damascus, was being shelled.

Today Syria is rebuilding after eight years of war. More than 1,550 schools have been rebuilt, and in the past month 10,000 teaching jobs were added. But U.S. war planners are still active.

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When forces in U.S. ruling circles contend with and denounce each other to justify foreign intervention — as is currently happening in reaction to the announced U.S. pullback from the Kurdish area of Syria — this generates speculation, analysis and confusion in the population, including among anti-war activists. It demands a clear political response.

This confusion takes place because U.S. apologists invent pretexts for the government's military interventions. They falsely claim it sends troops to defend democracy or to protect the human rights for some group. Rather, U.S. troops are sent to intervene only to protect and expand the strategic or economic interests of U.S. imperialism.

U.S. forces in Syria have brought nothing but misery to that country's people, including its Kurdish population. The Pentagon was there neither to promote democracy in Syria nor to defend Kurdish self-determination.

Washington has tried to maintain its dominance in the Middle East by inflaming sectarian, national, ethnic and religious differences. In the long war against Syria, where all the people of Syria have suffered, the many statements for or against the Kurds in Syria take the focus off the real culprit — U.S. imperialism.

U.S. out!

Therefore the best response, the only legitimate response, from anti-war forces in the U.S. is to re-raise the most basic demands: U.S. out of Syria! Respect Syrian sovereignty!

This response is the only viable solution to the more than eight years of U.S.-instigated war that have ripped Syria apart, displaced one-third of the population, created millions of refugees and homeless people, and laid waste to large parts of this once relatively prosperous, developing country.

Turkey has been a member of the U.S.-commanded NATO military alliance since 1952 and is the site of many NATO and U.S. military bases, including the major air base at Incirlik. The Turkish regime has played a criminal role in the efforts to dismember Syria.

Vice President Mike Pence's latest proposal on Oct. 17 to Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the latest scheme to keep Syria divided. In essence, two members of the NATO military alliance agreed to partition Syria under Turkish occupation.

Their meeting in Turkey was little different from the eight years of U.N.-brokered “peace negotiations” in Paris, Geneva, Vienna or New York.

These meetings of imperialist forces and their collaborators simply repeated that a ceasefire by the armed militias attacking the Damascus government would be possible only if the elected Syrian government, led by President Bashar al-Assad, resigned. Then these pirates would decide what regime would lead Syria and what forces and militias would control various regions.

U.S. instigated war on Syria

In 2011, after seven months of U.S./NATO bombing of Libya, U.S. policy makers in the Obama administration, including Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, had convinced the Turkish regime and others in the Middle East and in the European Union that they could quickly dismember Syria. The Turkish rulers opened their borders to the invading anti-Damascus forces and served as a major conduit of arms to them.

Eventually 100,000 mercenaries in competing gangs operated inside Syria against the Damascus government. They were backed by different US/NATO/Saudi/Israeli/UAE money and advisers. At the time, the corporate media were predicting that the Syrian government would collapse within six weeks.

But after eight years of massively destructive war, this complex, U.S.-orchestrated effort to dismember Syria has failed.

U.S. advisers and contractors were embedded in numerous mercenary bands, which often fought each other. One by one all were pushed back by Syria’s determined resistance and by assistance, first from Hezbollah militias in Lebanon, then from Iranian advisers, then in 2015, by decisive Russian intervention with air cover.

This assistance was both solidarity and self-interest. Each of these very different political entities identified with Syria’s plight and knew a U.S. “success” in dismembering Syria would make them a target.

Syria’s Kurdish population

Before 2011, the Kurdish population in northern Syria had a form of autonomy, with schools and services in their own language. In 2011, when the U.S.-backed destabilization effort started, Kurdish nationalists set up their own armed People's Protection Units – YPG.

In 2014, thousands of heavily armed ISIS terrorists swept into Syria, including northern Syria, with unprecedented brutality. The U.S. war strategists used ISIS terror as a convenient and cynical pretext to escalate military operations in Syria and to re-occupy Iraq. The Pentagon began openly bombing the whole region, destroying much of the developed infrastructure in Syria. At this time the Syrian government was fighting for its very survival in Aleppo and Damascus and was in no position to do more.

Washington offered the Kurds a military alliance and U.S. protection from both U.S. bombing and ISIS forces. The armed Kurdish YPG units entered into an alliance, maybe of convenience, maybe of survival, with U.S. imperialism.

Through the war years, the Syrian government, although it had no control over the Kurdish region of northeastern Syria, continued to pay salaries to health workers, teachers and all government officials throughout the country. This was a lifeline for the civilians in the whole region, even where they were under ISIS control.

The Kurdish forces in Syria, while in an alliance with the U.S., nevertheless made it a point to avoid attacking Syrian government forces. Their focus was on defeating ISIS forces.

Now, faced with an abrupt U.S. pullback and a Turkish onslaught, the Kurds have announced that they will seek a negotiated solution with the Syrian government. This seems to be already happening. It is a realistic choice.

Throughout these years of war, many social democrats, academics and anarchists in the imperialist countries have glorified and idealized the Kurdish capital of Rojava as a place of social revolution. Some have described Rojava as the most communist, communal, feminist society in the world. Unfortunately, these forces have counterposed uncritical support for the Syrian Kurds and the Kurdish city of Rojava to support for Syrian sovereignty against imperialist intervention.

Syrian government on unity

During eight years of brutal combat, Syria's government avoided publicly attacking the Kurds. Groups supporting Syrian sovereignty should take a similar attitude. Syrian officials have also avoided attacking Sunni forces as a religious group or any of the other groups which were swept up into this war by the imperialists' false promises.

Syria's position has always been that any Syrian force that lays down arms and stops fighting the Syrian government will be granted amnesty and be welcomed back into Syria. President Assad says in every public statement that Syrians have to consider how to put Syria back together after the war ends.

In sharp contrast, the Syrian government position has always been that all the uninvited foreign-funded forces — including the U.S., NATO, Turkey, ISIS, and tens of thousands of foreign mercenaries operating under many names and funded by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE — must leave Syria.

Syria's population of 22 million (5 million live abroad now as refugees) includes Arab, Kurdish, Assyrian, Armenian, Turkoman and Circassian nationalities as well as Sunni, Alawi, Shia, Druze, Yazidi, and Christian religious sects. There are also 1.5 million Palestinian and Iraqi refugees.

Syrian government spokespeople, diplomats and the mainstream Syrian media always assert that Syria is a secular and multi-ethnic, multinational, multireligious country and that the identity and culture of every group must be respected.

The Syrian government has again and again expressed its determination to resolve the problems among the whole mosaic of nationalities and religious groups within Syria, free of foreign interference.

U.S. plans in disarray

Today in Syria, U.S. plans are in complete disarray. Each of its many mercenary armies is defeated. Faced with a new reality on the ground, Turkey is now open to making other deals, possibly with Russia and Iran, which could destabilize NATO. This is why Pence rushed to visit Erdogan.

The Turkish ruling class fears having armed units of Kurds in Syria, because the Turkish army is waging a war against the far larger oppressed Kurdish population in Turkey.

The Kurds are an oppressed nation in Western Asia. Some 20 million people who identify as Kurds – the overwhelming majority of the Kurdish population in the Middle East – live in Turkey, where they are 25 percent of the population. They are denied the use of their own language in schools and services.

The Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK) is waging a guerrilla struggle against Turkish domination.

There are 1.5 to 2 million Kurds in Syria, where they make up 30 percent of the population in their northeastern region. Even this region is truly a mosaic of different peoples, not only Kurds. There are also 5 to 8 million Kurds living in Iraq and in Iran.

U.S. imperialism has often maneuvered to use for its own interests the movement of Kurds for independence against the governments in the region. And it has just as often abandoned the Kurdish movement.

U.S. wars, invasion, bombing campaigns and sanctions in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen; U.S. sanctions and threats on Iran; U.S. military bases and arms sales to the Gulf monarchies or to Egyptian dictators; and its decades of support for the Zionist occupation of Palestine have destabilized and impoverished Western Asia and North Africa.

U.S. imperialism is an enemy of all human progress.

All those interested in peace, human solidarity and national sovereignty need to refocus the discussion on Syria and more strongly demand: U.S. out!

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