



# Statement on the Assault on Eastern Aleppo

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The brutal attack on Eastern Aleppo by Russian and Syrian warplanes, bombing with bunker buster, incendiary and barrel bombs, has already killed hundreds of civilians, creating a landscape many have likened to Stalingrad in 1942, Warsaw in 1944 or better, perhaps, given the same perpetrator is involved, the Chechen capital, Grozny, in 2000.

The Syrian ceasefire brokered by the United States' Secretary of State, John Kerry, and Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, broke down largely as a result of a US airstrike on a Syrian Army position which left 62 soldiers dead and 100 injured. This, whether an accident or not, provided the pretext for an attack by missile-firing warplanes on a stationary Red Crescent aid convoy. Exactly who was directly responsible for that attack, and what their motives were, is not immediately clear. Assad, though clearly dependent on Russia for his survival, is pursuing his own objectives, which do not always coincide with Russian policy. Where he fears that policy might mean sacrificing himself, or threaten an approaching victory for his regime, he is prepared to frustrate Russian plans.

Whatever the exact course of events, Russia and Assad clearly decided to launch the current and, perhaps, final, offensive against Eastern Aleppo and they are responsible for the latest appalling war crimes. The fear that the Syrian Army and its Iranian and Lebanese allies would face bloody losses in street by street fighting has dictated their strategy of bombing homes, schools and hospitals in the hope of starving the population into submission. In the eight days since the launch of the new offensive, there have been 1700 airstrikes, with the makeshift hospitals deliberately targeted.

Now, it seems their forces have begun the final ground assault to take the eastern part of the city, with its estimated 250,00 inhabitants, that has resisted them for five years. But, if Russia, Assad, Iran and Hezbollah are the main war criminals in this instance, the US, Britain and France have themselves been major war criminals so many times before; in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Libya; that their posturing as prosecutors for violations of human rights can only arouse cynical laughter. Truly, the Great Powers are, as Lenin said, 'great beasts of prey' - beasts that are tearing Syria apart.

The same goes for the regional allies of both the major powers; for Russia, these are the Iranian and Iraqi forces, plus the Lebanese Hezbollah, who have enabled Assad to fight on. Without them, his regime would have collapsed years ago. For the West, apart from their nefarious doings in Syria itself, their allies are complicit in countless other atrocities; Saudi Arabia in Yemen today, Turkey against its Kurdish population. Nor should we forget Israel's flattening of Gaza in 2008 and 2014, which Bush and Obama did not even condemn, let alone try to stop.

US and Russian envoys are trading insults and staging walkouts at the UN, both claiming to be fighting terrorism whilst actually inflicting or condoning it. While such duplicity and hypocrisy come naturally to both sides, they can only be explained by reference to the bigger, global picture. The vast Eurasian landmass, with some 70 percent of the world's population, is becoming a chess board on which the economic and military rivalries between two imperialist blocs, the North American and European on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other, are being played out.

This new period of inter-imperialist conflict explains why the US fomented a fascist spearheaded coup in Ukraine, why Russia seized Crimea, and the subsequent sanctions regime imposed on Russia. That, in turn, explains Russia's determination to save Assad and Obama's unwillingness to risk a direct clash in Syria. His focus is on the other side of the super continent; the Pivot to Asia and the mounting friction with China there. This rivalry between the powers holds not only the threat of further regional wars but, eventually, even a world war.

Those parts of the left still influenced by the heritage of Stalinism or by the belief that there is only one imperialist bloc, led by the US and the EU, have refused to support the Syrian revolution. Even where the left in Europe and the US do not support Assad or Russia, they remain silent on their crimes and stand aloof from solidarity with the Syrian resistance because they believe it is all simply a tool of the US and Nato. In fact, socialists and the workers' movement world-wide need to stand independently of either imperialist block but in solidarity with revolutionary uprisings, like those of the Arab Spring, which all the great powers hate and fear more than they hate and fear each other.

The League for the Fifth International condemns Russia and the Assad regime for their atrocities and wholeheartedly supports the heroic defenders of East Aleppo. Appeals for Nato to intervene, however, are wrong and, besides that, utterly pointless. As we have said many times, the Western powers never intended to risk intervening directly against Russia and Assad; nor would they give Syrian revolutionaries the weapons with which they could have stopped the cruel aerial bombardments themselves.

In any case, the Nato powers are not the world's human rights policemen who can be called upon to intervene to bring the war criminals to justice. They themselves are war criminals on an equal or even greater scale as events in neighbouring Iraq and the city of Fallujah can testify. The United Nations, too, is impotent because the Security Council is a thieves' kitchen of the major imperialist powers who can veto any resolution that harms them, their allies or protectorates.

The US and the European Nato powers have done and will do nothing to help progressive forces in Syria fighting for democracy and human rights. They have, for example, never given the rebels the surface to air missiles that could have grounded the Syrian and Russian jets and helicopters. Nato cynically says this is because this would be to arm jihadist terrorists, the same terrorists that they know very well their regional allies are arming.

Recognising that it cannot remove Assad, and fearing the collapse of the Syrian state apparatus altogether, as happened in Iraq, the US has limited its objectives to restricting Russia's strategic interests in the region by making support for Assad as costly and as prolonged as possible. Thus, both the rival imperialist camps have happily used the war to crush and demoralise the revolutionary movement for democracy in Syria and across the Arab world.

The US, Britain and France attracted, then deceived, and then corrupted, the democratic forces. They encouraged those forces to look to them for aid, to imagine that as 'democracies' they would surely help to establish civil and human rights in Syria. At the same time, each of the West's regional allies (all with their own atrocious human rights records) has fostered and given arms to the Islamist forces it believes will support its own regional interests.

Together with their enemies, Russia and the Assad regime are tearing Syria to pieces, wrecking its human and cultural civilisation in the process. Some kind of partition on a sectarian basis is the likely outcome of any Geneva agreement, with de facto population transfers and a huge, permanent Syrian diaspora.

Meanwhile, the Islamist forces, even those defending the besieged populations, are, at the same time, trying to smother the most progressive aspects of the Syrian revolution. In short, the Syrian revolution is on the point of expiring. Nevertheless, revolutionary socialists world wide, though tragically they can do little or nothing to help materially, must do all they can to rouse popular support and to expose the plots and plans of their own imperialisms. They can and should exert all their influence to demand the admission of Syrian refugees into Europe and the decent welcome and integration of those already here, not condemnation to internment in permanent refugee camps.

Though the defenders of Aleppo are in the direst of military positions, the Assad regime is by no means all-powerful. It has to rely on Iranian and Hezbollah troops to spearhead its fighting forces and Russia's huge air power to blast its cities into rubble, forcing millions of its citizens to flee. Those allies will not stay forever. Any regime that slaughters, tortures and drives out millions of its own people is already in a pathological state of degeneration. Its fall will be sudden, and fall it eventually will. Then, the Syrian revolution will rise from the earth and settle accounts with its tormentors.

Down with Assad and his tyrannical regime

Solidarity with the Syrian resistance fighters

All imperialist forces out of Syria and the surrounding states

Turkish forces out of Syria

Mobilise against the New Cold War, whose 'hot' proxy wars could lead to a global conflagration

Down with the anti-refugee and migrant walls springing up across Europe

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