



Syria - Years of War?

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David Cameron has admitted that the war on ISIS could go on for years. All military experts agree that airpower alone cannot defeat ISIS because it cannot hold territory. Even if they carpet-bombed Mosul and Raqqa, ISIS forces would simply melt away and regroup, just as the Taliban has done in Afghanistan.

Asymmetric warfare is notoriously hard to win. In Iraq, the US, France and Britain have been bombing ISIS targets for more than a year. In addition, according to US National Intelligence, there are 190,000 Peshmerga and 193,000 Iraqi troops facing only 20,000-32,000 ISIS fighters, yet no great breakthrough has been achieved.

What can be guaranteed is that increased bombing will mean increased civilian casualties. Raqqa, the capital of the ISIS 'caliphate', already the target of French and Russian bombing, is a city of up to 400,000 people. According to sources inside the city, the jihadist fighters have relocated from camps into the heart of the civilian population. There are no bombs 'smart' enough to avoid killing and maiming civilians. Only last month, the US bombed a hospital in Afghanistan, killing 30 medics and a dozen patients. No Taliban fighters were even there. Refugees from Raqqa have pleaded with Hollande, Cameron and Co. not to bomb the city and kill their relatives.

What will be the main consequence of thousands more civilian casualties? For each casualty, there will be five or more angry civilians ready to join a fight against the imperialist bombers, some even joining ISIS.

If, as a whole series of British military experts have testified, aerial bombardment alone cannot defeat ISIS and, eventually, there will have to be 'boots on the ground', whose troops will be wearing them? Assad's brutal regime, which barrel bombs or gasses its enemies? Or sectarian Sunni jihadists supported by Saudi Arabia or Qatar? Or maybe Iraq's sectarian Shi'ite forces or Turkey's vicious anti-Kurdish army? To ask the question is to answer it; none of these forces sees ISIS as its main enemy. They will only mete out more violence on the civilian population and one another and foster more resistance.

In all probability, the UK, France and US would be drawn into a ground war in such circumstances and we would be back into an invasion and occupation lasting years. Except that, this time, France and Russia would also join in. This would be even more serious than the last decade's wars. The shooting down of a Russian plane by Turkey is an omen of the kinds of 'accidents' that could lead to a spiralling of conflict, drawing the reluctant allies into fighting each other.

Faced with such a dangerous prospect, a war that would be likely to prove deeply unpopular, more like Blair's Iraq than Thatcher's Falklands, why was Cameron so determined to join the bombing campaign? His motives are revealed in an article on the Financial Times website. It reports that,

'A Chatham House report last month said there were 'real concerns that the UK is becoming a diminished force in international affairs, with reduced defence capabilities and diplomatic resources, an introspective parliament and public and an overly mercantilist focus to its foreign policy' (a reference to Osborne and Cameron's courting of China - Ed). Mr Cameron's decision to send the RAF into Syria confirms a significant change in focus as the prime minister embarks on his second and final term in office determined to restore Britain's reputation as a global player.'

In other words, having suffered an ignominious defeat in Parliament in 2013, when he wanted to take military action against Assad, Cameron saw, in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, an opportunity to re-assert Britain's place in the

league of imperialist powers with the blood of Syrians and, maybe, of British aircrews.

We live in a precariously balanced world, where Russia and NATO are increasingly opposed to each other, and US-China tensions are mounting. It is one in which clashes between their regional proxies could lead to direct collisions between the nuclear powers. Britain joining the bombing war in the congested skies of northern Syria will only make this situation even more dangerous.

As the real aims of the imperialist powers begin to emerge; their support for anti-democratic regimes across the region, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and, increasingly, Erdogan's Turkey, and their backstabbing of the forces of the Arab Spring, including the Syrian revolution, this action will stink in the nostrils of millions as the Iraq and Afghan wars already do.

A growing and vocal internationalist antiwar movement in Britain will encourage those genuinely fighting for democracy and freedom in the Middle East and, indeed, everywhere. That is why, with or without a United Nations Security Council resolution, rank and file Labour Party and trade union members must continue to oppose UK bombing and pledge their organisations at every level to oppose it and rebuild a mass anti-war movement like that of 2003.

In this movement, we must call for the complete withdrawal of all Nato and Russian forces from the Middle East. At the same time, we have to mobilise in support of the democratic and working class forces across the region who are fighting Assad, Erdogan, El-Sisi and the royal despots in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

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