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Syria/Venezuela

# Revolution, civil war and imperialist intervention

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**This statement on Syria was issued by the Venezuelan revolutionary organization Marea Socialista (“Socialist Tide”) on 8 September 2013. Active since the beginning within the Chavista movement and the Bolivarian process, Marea Socialista is a current organized within the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela), founded by Hugo Chavez. It advocates deepening the popular process in Venezuela and mobilizes against the bureaucratization of this process. It is interesting, in this respect, to know its analysis and its positioning concerning events in Syria. Its call for the internationalist and democratic radical Left to make itself heard in a coordinated manner is also important.**

Since August 21, Syria has been on the front pages of the world’s press. The killing of more than 1,400 people with chemical weapons provided the excuse for Obama to launch a criminal threat of intervention by the United States against this already martyred Middle Eastern country. A threat in which he has got himself bogged down and which for that reason is even more dangerous.

A hundred thousand dead, half a million injured and maimed, more than a million (if you count only minors less than 18 years old) refugees; that is the balance sheet of the victims caused by the dictatorship of Bashar Al-Assad since March 2011. This makes the Syrian conflict one of the most tragic of the first years of the twenty-first century. These figures are those of the reports of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and so far nobody has challenged them.

The military intervention of the United States will only add to this tragedy with a very large dose of barbarism and the definite probability of a regional explosion with incalculable consequences.

For we who look at these things from the outside, without feeling in our own flesh the anguish and the daily violence, the pain and hatred due to the daily loss of relatives, friends or companions, the desolation and destruction of a country once known as "the land of cinnamon", the debate nevertheless unleashes raging passions and evokes a feeling of urgency faced with the dangers for humanity that an imperialist aggression represents.

How can we help stop the massacre in this country? What can we do to prevent the imperialist intervention which will cause a great new leap in the spiral of violence that strikes primarily the Syrian people and those of the region? What can we do to help ensure that this people which rose up against decades of oppression manages to achieve its objective? The answers to these questions, as to so many others, cut across the bitter debates that are developing in the so-called "Left" on a world scale.

The crisis of the capitalist system of domination, open from the 2007 financial crisis onwards, has initiated a new period of rebellion. A period of struggles and protests that have in their turn triggered revolutionary processes against governments and regimes in different countries of the world and challenged the traditional political organizations and institutions of capitalist governance. But they have also triggered counter-revolutions and wars whose purpose is to crush the rise of this new process of struggle of the peoples and their desire and determination for change.

In this new stage on a world level, the Arab Spring , that is to say, the process of democratic and anti-capitalist revolutions which has liquidated the old status quo that had lasted for more than five decades in the Near and Middle East, is the first regional laboratory for the confrontation between revolution and counter-revolution. The cost in human lives of the barbarism caused by dictators, by monarchs, by the fascist state of Israel and the leaders of world imperialism would be all for nothing if we do not learn the bitter lessons that these processes themselves provide us

with.

In our opinion, we are in the presence of a long-term process, whose development will consist of advances and retreats. A process which, with its peculiarities, different rhythms and distinct time scales, will continue to spread steadily. That is why the direct military intervention that U.S. imperialism is preparing for Syria is intended, among other objectives, to strike at a regional revolutionary process of which we must seek the origin in the structural crisis of capitalism, which has been open and visible since 2007.

Identify the root causes of the present conflict; identify the sectors in conflict and the role of each driving force; understand the internal dynamics of the forces, build an active solidarity in order to support the revolutionaries who are fighting over there: all this is so much raw material for the debate we must conduct so as to dispel the darkness caused by the big imperialist propaganda media and those of the Syrian hereditary dictatorship and its allies. At the risk of being unilateral, the contribution to the debate that we want to make with this text must be seen in relation to our position in Bolivarian Venezuela and our struggle in defence of the conquests of the revolutionary process in our country.

### **Syria: A chapter of the Arab revolution**

The outbreak of the first popular protests in Syria in March 2011 followed, with its own peculiarities, the model and the goals of the rebellions in Tunisia and Egypt. Popular mobilizations which became transformed into massive rebellions demanding freedom, social justice and dignity.

At that point, the expansive wave of what was called the Arab Spring included several countries in the region: Yemen, Morocco, Bahrain, Libya, in addition to the two countries already mentioned, Tunisia and Egypt. Nobody dared to talk then, in the Syrian case, of foreign intervention, except for the participation of Russia, which has from the beginning provided military support to the regime in Damascus. After a month of protests, the repression unleashed by the Syrian government had already left a balance sheet of 3,000 fatalities among protesters.

The semi-legal opposition, tolerated by the government of the Assad clan, rushed to his aid and concocted, in concert with the regime, a relative and manipulative policy of opening, embodied in a new constitution designed to give the regime a democratic facade. This did not prevent increasingly cruel and disproportionate repression, which accumulated victims by the hundreds each week, nor did it stop the protests that took shape and grew in number and combativeness. As events unfolded, even the so-called reforms granted with this pusillanimous opposition were considered unnecessary by Assad, with the cynical argument that the Syrian people had not asked for them.

The criminal NATO intervention in Libya, the brutal absorption of the process in Yemen, the cosmetic reforms in Morocco, the crushing of the revolt in Bahrain by forces from Saudi Arabia, the cruel crescendo of violence in Syria, the coup d'état in Egypt; all this has not so far put a stop to the wave of revolts that toppled Ben Ali and Mubarak, and has not "stabilized" the region.

Quite the contrary: in a few months, this process has liquidated the old status quo laboriously built up by the United States in the region with its Western allies, Israel and the monarchies and dictatorships that have ruled the region over the past fifty years. A status quo that was, from its inception, backed by the USSR, which no longer exists. A status quo that was first shaken by the Iranian revolution against the Shah and that Bush Jr. tried to restore with the occupation of Iraq, which is now an obvious failure. Between January and June, 2011, in scarcely six months, this chessboard, shaky but supported for decades by the United States in order to ensure their control of a region that is strategic because of its natural resources and its geographical location, vanished.

This is the framework in which the Syrian revolution became a civil war, or an armed conflict, and then became the terrain of tragic intervention by global and regional powers. In the first place, and from the beginning of the revolution, there was support in weapons and equipment provided by Russia to a Syrian government that was supposedly "legitimate" in the eyes of "international law", but had demonstrated over the last thirty years, for those who had eyes to see, its character as a bloodstained regime. Since then, the spiral of horror has been completed with the present U.S. threat of massive destruction.

### **An atypical civil war**

The civil war in the United States in the late nineteenth century, the one in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution and the Spanish Civil War between Republicans and Nationalists, to mention only a few examples, were characterized on both sides by relatively concentrated political and military command centres. This is not the case of the rebel camp in the civil war in Syria.

The evolution of the Syrian revolution followed the "model" of the Arab Spring: mass mobilizations that extended to the rest of the country from the cities where the rebellion began. The peaceful nature of the demonstrations was defended by the Local Coordination Committees until the repression had gone from the use of snipers and assassinations in the street to the direct intervention of the armed forces of the regime, acting as an army of occupation in their own country and using all the weapons that one of the best equipped armies in the region had at its disposal. The peaceful protests gave way to armed defence on the part of the population, which tried and is still trying to resist inside the country. But this armed defence is atomized, local and extremely defensive.

A rejection of the first massacres caused desertions from the armed forces of the regime and a military centre of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was installed in Turkey and began to try to organize a defence force of the revolution. But the FSA brigades operating within the country do so on the basis of local criteria and needs, without answering to a general plan and a single command, which moreover does not really exist.

Without a single national centre of the rebellion in the country, with a political leadership abroad paralyzed by insurmountable political and tactical differences, with its military forces acting without connection and without central control; such a situation favoured the intervention of sectarian and extremist foreign militias who answer to those who finance and arm them and conduct a political and ideological struggle that corresponds only to their own interests. These *takfiri* extremist forces, funded by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, just like the militias linked to Al Qaeda, act in the interests of these monarchies and try to direct the war in agreement with them, but their objectives and conceptions are rejected by the Syrian people.

So, without being able to build a unified political leadership or a single military command, the revolutionary Syrian people has been driven to exchange the peaceful nature of its engagement for armed defence of the revolution in order to confront the regime's brutality. Much more than a conventional civil war, we are confronted with the armed defence of a revolution attacked in a ferocious manner by all the destructive force of the state apparatus.

### **We reject imperialist intervention because it goes against the revolution**

Contrary to what Assad claims, the main objective of the military intervention planned by the U.S. is not the overthrow of the Syrian regime. Obama says his aim is to lead a punitive action against Damascus, but we cannot really believe that. Instead, Assad's fall could be considered by imperialism as collateral damage if it happened as a result of its military intervention.

The main concern of this old and weakened imperialism, still dominant in the world, is the uncertainty affecting this

region and the participation of a large number of forces that have their own interests: Russia, China, Iran, Israel, Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia, Al Qaeda, etc. According to the North American logic, none of these forces, with the exception of Israel, should impose itself on the others, at the risk of challenging the Yankee world domination.

On the other hand, as the main counter-revolutionary force, the United States cannot allow the process of regional rebellion to develop. It is for this reason that it justifies and treats in a friendly way the government resulting from the military coup in Egypt, it goes along with the various currents of political Islam that are subordinated to capital, as in the case of Tunisia or previously, of Morsi in Egypt. It facilitated the repression in Yemen and encouraged Saudi Arabia to intervene militarily in Bahrain.

It is certainly not the alleged "anti-imperialism" of the dictatorship in Damascus that worries Obama. Nor is it the false socialism of the state party that governs Syria, a country that, before the conflict, had 40 per cent of its population living below the poverty line. Nor is it a plan for gradual domination of the region. It is on the contrary the conviction that the extension of the rebellion that began in Tunisia in late 2010, and which has spread in this historically volatile region of the world, can put an end to the puppet totalitarian regimes that oppress these peoples and lead to the questioning of the very existence of the criminal state of Israel.

That is why we support these peoples and this revolutionary process, which Obama also wants to strike with his intervention against the rebellious, heroic, martyred Syrian people, and this is why we emphatically reject imperialist intervention.

### **The erroneous argumentation of comrades who support Bashar al-Assad**

For comrades who only see the bloody imperialism of the United States, the world is something simple and predictable and history repeats itself like an endless wheel. They see the international reality as a black and white photograph between on the one hand the intentions, hopes and policies of Obama - or any Yankee president - and the rest of humanity on the other. They do not seem to have learned yet of the death of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, or the restoration of capitalism in Russia and China, or the global crisis that erupted in 2007 and is the most serious crisis of the last hundred years. They close their eyes to a process of regional rebellion that has lasted two and a half years. And when they talk about it, they describe it as a plan meticulously designed by the United States, which they present as omniscient and omnipotent, thus despising the popular revolts.

The arguments of these sectors rely fundamentally on the denial of facts and reality. For them, there is no real civil war in Syria, but they publish in abundance photographs of "rebels killing Syrian soldiers." There was no use of chemical weapons, but at the same time they assert that "only the rebels have used them." They characterize as identical the foreign fundamentalist brigades and forces which oppress and act against the objectives of the revolution, and the rebel Syrian people, thus justifying Assad's repression against this people.

They say that if we do not defend Assad, we are necessarily in the camp of the imperialist intervention. They argue that there is not a massive sector of the Syrian people who reject the regime and as proof of this, they say that Assad is still in power. But they overlook the fact that the regime maintains itself by conducting a massacre against a poorly armed people and by the destruction of much of the country.

They do not speak of the figures advanced by UN bodies such as UNHCR, which estimate the number of victims at more than 100,000 dead, two million refugees and half a million wounded. But they demand that the UN publishes the report of its inspectors on chemical weapons and that it finds a political solution to the conflict. A conflict whose nature, besides, they deny.

And those who have no problem denying the dictatorial nature of the regime of this hereditary republic justify its defence in the name of the "lesser evil."

This superficial and conspiratorial view of history is at the same time intolerant with those who, though in the camp of the opposition to imperialist intervention, think differently and do not accept to defend the Assad clan. And when their arguments fall short, they spend their time discrediting, making groundless accusations against and criminalizing those who have different opinions.

### **The need to make the voice of the radical Left heard**

We do not take it upon ourselves - and we think it would be a mistake and a lack of respect for those who are struggling in the region – to enter into tactical discussions. We believe that we must respect the views of those who, in the ongoing popular processes, defend revolutionary objectives. That is why we call for this statement signed by organizations from different countries in the region, and among them Syria, [\[1\]](#) to be made known widely.

However, we cannot limit ourselves to expressing our rejection of imperialist intervention and solidarity with the Syrian people in their struggle. There are many of us in the world who have, since the beginning of the Arab Spring, supported unconditionally these revolts. But we have so far done so in isolation from each other, each in our own countries, where we live.

For we who struggle against capital, the recovery of the internationalist tradition is a fundamental task in order to confront the new times that are emerging today. A first step in reviving this tradition is the need to create spaces for discussion and for joint action and solidarity that has an international impact.

If we do not act, the position of those sectors of the Left in the world who support the Syrian regime will represent a debt that the mass movement will make all those who situate themselves on the left pay, without distinction.

It is necessary for the voice of the radical Left to be heard on the level of its real power. So that the peoples who are struggling in the world can see that there is a different Left; plural, democratic, anticapitalist, genuinely committed against imperialist brutality and against all forms of barbarism.

Behind the toxic clouds that cover today the daily life and death of the rebel Syrian people, our duty is to take steps forward, towards an international coming together of the radical Left, which acts as an amplifier of the cry for freedom and the dignity that comes from deep within the collective memory of the peoples who are struggling .

### **A necessary clarification concerning the attacks against Santiago Alba Rico**

It is unfortunate that from within our Bolivarian process voices have been raised, attacking Santiago Alba Rico. By distorting his positions, they use them to discredit him and present them as purported evidence of a pro-imperialist posture. These are the same people who, short of arguments, discredit those who think otherwise and want to cast doubt on his political and intellectual honesty, almost accusing him of being an imperialist agent.

Santiago Alba Rico lives in Tunisia: he is a writer, a philosopher and an activist of the Arab Spring. A friend of the Bolivarian Revolution, he was invited to Venezuela on several occasions by the government of President Chavez to participate in the jury of the Libertador Prize for Critical Thinking. He was part of the organizing committee of the last Forum against the Debt of the Countries of the Mediterranean, held in Tunis. He is a member of the Freedom Flotilla in Solidarity with Palestine. He is a friend of the Cuban Revolution and of the processes that are opposed to neoliberalism in Latin America. In a recent article, Atilio Borón, winner of the Libertador Prize for Critical Thinking in

2013, defended his integrity as a left-wing activist, although he does not share his position.

Marea Socialista, which includes Santiago among its friends on the international level, wants to express here its solidarity. We also reject any kind of accusatory insults in the debate over ideas, as well as the intention of suppressing critical internationalism and the aim of imposing a single thought based on dogmatic illusions and not on the facts of reality, honestly analyzed and verified.

*Carlos Carcione, Stalin Pérez, Juan Garc a, Zuleika Matamoros, Gonzalo G mez, Alexander Marin*

*Caracas, September 8, 2013*

From [Aporrea](#).

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[1] [We Stand Behind the Syrian People's Revolution - No to Foreign Intervention](#).