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Syria

Calling for an end to intervention is not nearly enough

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The ceasefire in Syria concluded on September 9, 2016 between the US and Russia came to an end on September 19 at 7pm. It was a total failure politically, military and in humanitarian terms.

For some sections of the “left” and sections of the antiwar movement in the USA and Britain, the failure of the truce is a result of the internationalisation of the war in Syria. This is explained by [British Stop the War activist Chris Nineham](#) : “The central problem is the internationalisation of the war. Syria has for years been a theatre in which regional and global powers have been pursuing their geopolitical interests – prolonging and intensifying the conflict. This process has been gathering pace recently and in the run up to the worrying US election there are growing calls for further western escalation”.

Anyone reading the article will notice that not a single word is said about the destructive policies of the criminal and authoritarian Assad regime – the main source of nearly half a millions deaths in the country, forced displacement of millions inside and outside of Syria and destruction throughout the country. This is not a simple oversight and this is why, as I will show, simply calling an end to all interventions, putting them on the same level, to reach peace in Syria as stated in Nineham’s text is not enough and is simply wrong.

Firstly, the truce was far from being respected by the regime and its allies. Military clashes resumed violently few days before the official end of the truce, while the delivery of humanitarian aid to besieged cities was done only sparingly for the vast majority, except in the case of the town of Talbiseh in Homs province to which aid was delivered on September 19 the first time since July. The convoy brought in food, water and hygiene supplies for up to 84,000 people. But most aid shipments envisaged under the truce have yet to go in besieged cities. The liberated areas of Aleppo (neither under the domination of the Assad regime nor Daech or Fateh al-Sham, former Jabhat al-Nusra), in which around 275,000 residents are again subject to a terrible siege and the military bombardment of the regime and its Russian ally after a brief interruption, have for example received no aid, while this was one of the priorities in the agreement concluded between Russia and the USA in the ceasefire.

Armed opposition forces to the Assad regime, including groups of the Free Syrian Army and various Islamic fundamentalist movements, announced a few hours before the end of the ceasefire that they were preparing to launch a new military offensive to break the siege imposed on the liberated areas of Aleppo. Syrian or Russian aircraft – it still remains to be determined who were the authors of the raid – struck an aid convoy near Aleppo between the night of September 19 and 20. According to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), this killed around 20 civilians”, including the head of one of its local offices, Omar Barakat, and damaged at least 18 of 31 trucks in a U.N. and SARC convoy along with an SARC warehouse. The convoy was delivering aid for 78,000 people in the hard-to-reach town of Urm al-Kubra in Aleppo Governorate. At least 36 civilians were killed in Aleppo and its province in Syrian or Russian raids on Monday night.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the deaths of 237 people, including 38 children, from air strikes on Aleppo city and the surrounding countryside between September 19, when the ceasefire ended, and 26. Of those documented deaths, 162 were in opposition held east Aleppo city.

Russia and the Syrian regime also accused the US of undermining the continuation of the ceasefire after the U.S.-led coalition bombed Assad regime forces in Deir ez-Zor of, killing more than 60 soldiers, while allowing Daech fighters of capturing Mont Thourda, which dominates the airport held by the regime. US officials said it was a mistake and apologized to the families of victims. It is interesting to note that once again Chris Niehman joined this particular

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version by writing “One thing is for sure, the bombing of Syrian army positions around Deir ez-Zour by western coalition forces, including the US, Britain, Denmark and Australia, which led to the deaths of 60 or more Syrian soldiers, will have been a major blow to the prospects of any ceasefire holding”.

The Assad regime ultimately announced officially on September 19 that the seven-day truce period had ended and it accused “terrorist groups,” a term the regime uses for all opposition groups, whether peaceful or armed, of exploiting the calm to rearm while violating the ceasefire 300 times, and vowed to “continue fulfilling its national duties in fighting terrorism in order to bring back security and stability”.

These accusations are attempts to hide the continuation of the war led by the forces of the Assad regime and its allies against Syrian civilians and opposition during the week of the ceasefire. Russian and Assad’s regime airstrikes took place in various areas held by the opposition during the week of the ceasefire resulting in 26 civilians killed, including 8 children. On September 18, regime airstrikes targeted the liberated districts of Aleppo killing one civilian and eleven others in the province of Deraa after dropping explosive barrels.

Meanwhile the besieged district of Waer in Homs, the last bastion of the city controlled by the opposition and in which between 60,000 and 75,000 people live, is in the process of undergoing the same fate as the town of Daraya few weeks ago. An agreement was reached with the regime to transfer some of the residents and fighters in the region of Idlib, in the hands of Fateh al-Sham (former Jabhat al-Nusra) and Ahrar Sham. Homs Governor Talal Barazi said on September 19 that the evacuation would include 22 busses transferring around 300 fighters and their families, around 1,000 people in total.

The Assad regime has several times used this strategy of local agreements with cities and / or districts besieged and continuously bombed to forcefully displaced local population opposed to the regime to leave their homes for other areas under control of the opposition. These regions such as Idlib are still suffering, from Assad’s regime and Russian airstrikes and lack often the sufficient means to welcome the newcomers, not to mention the political and social pressures sometimes imposed on them by Islamic fundamentalist movements in this area.

At the political level, this ceasefire was born to fail because it did not address the political roots of the problem in Syria: the Assad regime. The agreement provided for greater military coordination between Russia and the United States in the “war against terrorism” in Syria, targeting the jihadist groups of the Islamic State and Fateh al-Sham, by the establishment of a Joint Implementation Center. The agreement did not denounce the interventions of the Islamic republic of Iran, Hezbollah and other various Shi’a fundamentalist militias alongside the Assad regime, while it was completely silent and did not mention any political transition to a democratic system and the departure of Assad dictator and his criminal clique. This political agreement concretely actually led to stabilization of the Assad regime under the so-called pretext of the “War against terrorism” for the political interest of the USA and Russia. That is why this agreement was rejected by large sections of the democratic opposition, whether armed or peaceful.

Meanwhile, the Turkish armed forces continued their progress in the Syrian border territories and their support to armed opposition groups (factions of the Free Syrian Army, Turkmen factions, and Islamic fundamentalist movements) to impose a form of Turkish “safe zone” cleansed of Kurdish PYD forces and Daech. In the city of Jarablus, conquered during this military intervention, the Turkish armed forces were attempting to impose a Turkmen council to govern the city, instead of another council, which has been established for two years and is recognized by the temporary government and the Aleppo province council, in addition to all Jarablus constituents, according to [Mohamed al-Ali](#), head of the current Jarablus council.

At the same time, the great majority of the Syrian Kurdish political movements, including the PYD and Kurdish National Council, were angered by the recent transition plan, proposed by the opposition’s High Negotiations Committee for the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, as the plan did not envision any

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form of federalism in post-war Syria. The High Negotiations Committee for the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces proposed the principle of administrative decentralization in managing the country's affairs. The Kurdish National Council, which is part of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces but which has failed repeatedly to recognize Kurdish rights with this latter or the previous Syrian National Council at the 2011 Tunis Conference and at subsequent conferences in Geneva and Riyadh, stated clearly that "this document is not part of a solution, but rather a danger to a democratic, pluralistic and unified Syria guaranteeing cultural, social and political rights to all its ethnic, religious and linguistic groups". They add "Whoever reads the document notes immediately that point 1 of the "General Principles" exclusively lists the Arab culture and Islam as sources "for intellectual production and social relations". This definition clearly excludes other cultures – be they ethnic, linguistic or religious – and sets the majority culture as the leading one. [As Syrian Kurds](#), we feel repulsed by this narrow perception of the Syrian people. The similarities between this definition and the chauvinist policies under the Assad regime are undeniable".

It is true that the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces has long lost any legitimacy to represent the aspirations for democracy, social justice and equality of the Syrian revolution and revolutionaries by its alliance with dictatorships and authoritarian regimes in the region, while collaborating with sectarian and reactionary forces (Jaysh Islam) or seeking more cooperation with them (Ahrar Sham and Fateh al-Sham). Just as its corruption and promotion of neoliberal policies, and rather poor consideration for democracy, in addition to its chauvinist and racist policies against Kurdish people, objectively oppose the objectives of building of a new Syria for all Syrians without discrimination. The hope for radical and positive change relies rather in the popular organisations and local councils still struggling for the initial objectives of the revolution, which we saw notably in February in the partial ceasefire, organising mass democratic and non sectarian demonstrations throughout the country. These people still exist and still struggle.

We agree with Chris Nineham's words "The anti-war movement needs to raise its voice and demand an end to the foreign interventions that are tearing Syria apart". All international and regional imperialist interventions occurred against the interests of the Syrian people and the objectives of the revolution for democracy, social justice and equality, while often strengthening sectarian and ethnic tensions in the country. This said, the interventions of Assad allies, notably Russia and Iran, have been much more significant and destructive at all levels. And contrary to what Nineham suggests or draws as two possible conclusions of the Deir Zor incident that "either elements in the western coalition are still conducting an unreported war against the Assad regime, or their claims about the limited nature of accidental killing as a result of their bombing are complete fantasy".

This first claim can completely be ignored, the constant policy of the US and Western states has not been to change the Assad regime in Syria, but to maintain it as showed in [previous articles](#). This has been done in addition to preventing any armed assistance to democratic groups of the Free Syrian Army. So we are quite far any "unreported war against the Assad regime".

This is however not enough and responsibilities should clearly be pointed out in the war in Syria. Imperialist manoeuvres have of course to be opposed as they are against the interests of the Syrian people and have destructive consequences, but it should not be limited to this, while ignoring the role of Assad's regime, at the risk of loosing the objectives of stopping the war. In in this context, the continuation of the war by the Assad regime and its allies, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, against the Syrian people make it impossible to end the war in the current conditions. One simple example of this is the campaign against medical personnel and facilities. There have been 382 attacks on medical facilities in Syria between March 2011, when the Syrian civil war began, and June 2016, according to data collected by Physicians for Human Rights. Of those strikes, at least 344 "or 90 percent" were conducted by Syrian government forces or Russian forces fighting on behalf of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. These forces have also killed over 700 medical personnel in Syria, according to the group's statistics.

This is why any political transition to end the war and towards a democratic system must include the departure of the

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dictator Assad and his clique from power, otherwise the war will continue and provoke more catastrophes in terms of human lives. In this transition, all war criminals must be held accountable for their crimes, including and firstly Bashar al-Assad and his clique as they are the main force responsible for around 500,000 deaths and the forced displacements of millions of people since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011.

The end of the war is an absolute humanitarian and political necessity. The end of the war must lead to the end of the suffering of millions of people inside and outside Syria and give them the possibility to return to their homes. The end of the war is also a political objective because it is the only way for democratic and progressive forces to reorganise and once again play a leading role in the struggle for a new Syria for all without discrimination far from the dictatorship of the criminal Assad regime and the authoritarian practices of Islamic fundamentalist forces. At the same time, there is a need to empower the democratic popular movement and FSA democratic groups upholding the objectives of the revolution and uniting the various components of the Syrian people to challenge sectarianism and racism.

We should remember the action of activist Rima Dali in April 2012 who stood in front of the Syrian Parliament in Damascus holding a banner that read, "Stop the killing. We want to build a country for all Syrians", it remains indeed a priority and very much current in the context of today.

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