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Syria:

# Origins, dynamics and developments of the revolutionary process

- Features -

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**This is the English language version of an interview that was done for the Greek publication [Ela Liberta](#).**

**As you often remark in your articles the Syrian revolution was the combined result of three factors: the authoritarianism of the regime, the neoliberalism implementation and the revolutionary wave which started at Tunisia. Would you like to enlarge on that?**

I would just like to remind indeed that the Syrian revolutionary process is part of the regional uprising that started in December Tunisia spreading to Egypt then in January and then the rest of the region. These uprising, although with counter revolutions attacks from ancient regime, Islamic fundamentalist forces and various imperialist and sub imperialist forces, have and continue to shaken the entire MENA region, with new popular uprisings erupting last summer in Lebanon and Iraq.

The revolutionaries in Syria are fighting like the other activists in the countries of the region for freedom and dignity in the absence of democracy and increasing social inequalities and corruption of the elites.

The mass basis of the popular movement in Syria is that of economically marginalized urban and rural workers, and urban employees and self-employed workers, who have borne the brunt of the implementation of neoliberal policies, which accelerated the crony capitalist nature of the Assad regime, in particular since the coming to power of Bashar al-Assad in 2000 succeeding his father Hafez, who was in power since 1970. The geography of the revolts in Idlib and Deraa, as well as in other rural areas, all historical strongholds of the Baath party which had not played a large role in the insurgency of the early 1980s, including the suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo, shows the involvement of the victims of neo-liberalism in this revolution. The initiative fell to the periphery of the large cities of Damascus and Aleppo, from villages to medium sized cities. The uprising in the city of Deraa, regarded as a bastion of the Ba'ath, from where a number of senior dignitaries of the Baath originated, like vice-chair Farouk el Shareh, embodied the bankruptcy of a state and its elites, who had for years abandoned to their own fate the rural classes and the outlying cities which they came from, to the benefit of policies promoting the bourgeois classes of Damascus and Aleppo. This tension between the centre and the peripheries of the country fully justifies a "materialistic" approach specifying the "internal" causes of the Syrian revolution.

Neo liberal policies were accelerated massively when Bashar al-Assad took power in 2000 after the death of his father Hafez Al-Assad, who was in power since 1970. These policies, accelerated by the savage repression of any popular or working class protest since the early 2000s, have had devastating effects. At the same time, the Assad regime became more dependent on the Assad Makhoul family clan, with a resulting over concentration of patronage, opportunities and corruption in its hands at the expense of the older regime clients. Rami Makhoul, the cousin of Bashar al-Assad, represented the mafia-style process of privatisation led by the regime. A process of privatization created new monopolies in the hands of relatives of Bashar al-Assad, while the quality of goods and services declined.

Assad also weakened the Baath party apparatus and workers and peasant unions (more organized as corporations) because they were viewed as obstacles to neo liberal economic reform. So the regime starved them of funds and attacked their powers of patronage. As explained by Raymond Hinnebusch, a scholar, "this debilitated the regime's organised connection to its constituency and its penetration of neighborhoods and villages. The gap was partly filled by the security services, which however were underpaid, corrupt and lax, moreover, Assad curbing of their ability to dispense patronage and legal exemptions, such as tolerance of smuggling, reduced their ability to co-opt societal

notables such as tribal elders, symptomatic of this was the mid decade outbreak of several localized sectarian / tribal conflicts (between Bedouin and Druze in Sweida, and between Alawis and Ismaelis in Masyaf), which manifested an erosion of the regime. Where citizens would once have gone to local party or union officials for redress or access, increasingly they approached tribal, sectarian and religious notables.”

On the economic level, the private sector before the popular uprising was contributing to the up to 65% of the GDP (and more than 70% according to other estimates), while it is also the biggest employer as approximately 75% of the labor force in Syria work in the private sector.

On the eve of the uprising of March 2011, the unemployment rate stood at 14.9%, according to official figures “20-25% according to other sources; it was respectively 33.7% and 39.3% among those aged 20-24 and 15-19 years. In 2007, the percentage of Syrians living below the poverty line was 33 %, which represented approximately seven million people, while 30% of them were just above this level. The proportion of poor is higher in rural areas (62 %) than in urban areas (38 %). Poverty is more widespread, more rooted and more marked (58.1 %) in the northwest and northeast (the provinces of Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ezzor and Hassakeh), where 45% of the population lives.

Real GDP growth and real per capita income has been decreasing since the beginning of the 90s. This has pushed the regime to continue its neo liberal policies and search for more private capitals. Meanwhile ownership of land was increasingly concentrated in a small number of hands. A frontline of a satirical newspaper put it well “after 43 years of socialism, feudalism returns.”

In agriculture, the privatization of land at the expense of several hundreds of thousands of peasants from the northeast, because of drought between 2007 and 2009 in which one million peasants received international aid and food supplies, while 300,000 persons were driven to Damascus, Aleppo and other cities, should not be perceived as the consequence of a simple natural disaster. Even before the drought, between 2002 and 2008 Syria had lost 40% of its agricultural workforce, dropping from 1.4 million to 800,000 workers. Between 2006 and 2010, the total workers employed in agriculture dropped in the Jazira region (north east of Syria) by 20%. The growth and intensification of the exploitation of the land by big agribusiness companies – including lands previously retained for grazing, and even the illegal drilling of wells -, as well as the establishment of lines of selective water meeting the requirements of the new major owners - facilitated the corruption of the local administration which accompanied the agricultural crisis.

In 2008, 28% of farmers were exploiting 75% of irrigated land, while 49% of them had only 10% of the latter, which is evidence of the progress of inequalities within agriculture. Small farmers with land on the outskirts of cities were actually selling their smallholdings for increasingly large amounts as funds from abroad (particularly the Gulf) pour into the country.

The Assad regime policies were totally led by neo liberal dynamics, with its priority on capital accumulation and growth to the neglect of equality and distribution. The private sector became the main agent for investments and employment, which however could not fill the gap left by the public sector decline. In the same time, investments by the state in social services diminished considerably, while subsidies were progressively removed or diminished in agriculture inputs, fuel, etc.... The responsibility of social services was given increasingly to private charities, and therefore bourgeoisie and conservative layers of the society. In the area of health notably, the regime withdrew considerably, letting an increasing space to charitable associations, and especially religious ones. In 2004, Of 584 charitable organizations, 290 were registered Islamic organizations, of which most are active in Damascus and its suburbs. They are based in local mosques and poor neighborhoods Of the more than 100 charitable organizations in the capital, approximately 80 per cent are Sunni Islamic: these operate a network that serves about 73,000 families with a budget with a budget of around 842 millions of Syrian Pounds (SP) or 18 millions of dollars to more than 73000 families.

Neo-liberal policies have re-enforced religious associations, both Islamic and Christian, in Syria and their network of diffusion, increasing their role in society at the expense of the State. Bashar al-Assad actually continued a strategy of fostering Islamic conservative sectors as his father did.

We should not forget as well the regime's authoritarianism against any form of dissent in the country and this for decades,

**In Syria, as in other Arab countries, there are organizations and parties which are self-defined as "left wing" but which have supported the dictatorial regimes. What is the precise form of this phenomenon in Syria and what were its impacts on the popular and workers' movements?**

Many of the left stalinist groups gathered within the National Progressive Front, a coalition of forces owing allegiance to the regime, did not have a large following so it did not have any kind of harsh consequences, while in addition example many youth members of the Qassioun faction, one of the largest communist trends coopted into the state coalition the national progressive front, left the party because they were disgusted by the behavior of their leadership supporting the Assad regime.

Regarding the worker's movement, the problem is that the leadership of the trade unions were completely controlled by the regime and Baath party. The independent popular organizations – trade unions, professional groups (such as those of doctors, lawyers, engineers or pharmacists), civic associations and so on – have been repressed, and mostly dissolved in 1980, after a decade of hard struggle at the Assad regime. They had been hitherto in the forefront of fighting for a return to democratic freedoms and the lifting of the state of emergency. In 1980, these organizations were replaced by structures placed under the direct control of the state.

The regime thus imposed its total domination on key sectors of society, such as the universities and the army. It banned all independent political activity, except of course that of the Baath Party, which was alone allowed to organize conferences and public demonstrations, from campuses to barracks, or publish and disseminate a newspaper. Even the political parties allied to it within the National Progressive Front did not have the right to organize, make propaganda or to have a small official presence in the public space. We will analyze later the specific role of the Baath party, in particular after the coming to power of Hafez al-Assad. It is sufficient to note here that it controlled a wide range of corporatist, so-called popular, organizations, grouping peasants, youth, women and so on, through which many sectors of society have been placed under the tutelage of the regime. The role of the Ba'ath, thus transformed into an instrument of control of society, and thus deprived of any ideological dynamism, was therefore deeply changed with the arrival of Hafez al-Assad in power. The organization of the party was changed, with the suppression of internal elections and their replacement by a system of designation from above, of co-option, decided by the regime and the security services, while the elements opposed to the policies of the regime were repressed.

The repression also struck all the political parties who refused to submit to the diktat of Hafez al-Assad and participate in the National Progressive Front (NPF). At the beginning of the 1970s, several secular parties, in particular of the left, had been the targets of the regime, including the February 23 Movement (a radical Baath tendency, close to the former president Salah Jadid), the League of Communist Action (Rabita al amal al shuyu'i), part of whose members came from the Alawite community and, to a lesser extent, the Communist Party of the political Bureau (CPPB) of Ryad Turk. The national gathering, which included various parties of the left, had also been severely repressed in the early 1980s. During this decade, the Muslim Brotherhood was also affected strongly by the repression.

**What were the demands of the people who participated in the demonstrations during the spring and summer of 2011? Was there, at this first stage of mobilization, any political force that attempted to express these demands? What were the organizational forms and on what level in the mass movement?**

Initially the people asked for reforms with particular demands such as the end of the emergency state (that has been ongoing since 1963), the liberation of political prisoners, etc... in the first weeks, but following the brutal and violent of the regime's repression they started demanding the overthrow of the people.

The actors in this movement came from several components. In the first place, there were activists involved in the struggles against the regime before the uprising of 2011, in particular since the "Damascus Spring" (2001), coming from middle class layers, often young graduates and users of social networks. Their activities were aimed mainly at respect for democratic rights in Syria; some of them had already mobilized against the war in Iraq and for the Palestinian cause. They were in their great majority secular democrats belonging to all communities, including minorities such as the Alawites, Christians, Druze and so on.

Examples also include various activist groups from different regions of the country, like the Youth of Daraya, on the outskirts of Damascus, who were socially active for almost ten years, launching a campaign against corruption or organizing a demonstration after the fall of Baghdad, in April 2003, in the course of which they were arrested under the pretext of "forming an unregistered political group and spreading sectarianism". The Youth of Daraya drew on historical examples of non-violent movements. They formed a mobile library and distributed books to the people of their neighbourhood. They cleaned the streets. They showed films on Gandhi in a mosque.

We had also the example of the Syrian Revolutionary Youth, a grassroots movement offering a third alternative beyond the regime/Islamists binary, whose clear, principled stance made it the target of extreme regime persecution. Established by a group of activists from Rukneddine, the Syrian Revolutionary Youth advanced a vision of social justice where free education, free health care, gender equality, the liberation of the occupied Golan Heights, and liberation of Palestine, were central to their demands. The group has almost fully been dissolved as a collective, while some members of the Syrian Revolutionary Youth continue to languish in Syrian regime jails.

All these activists were present from the beginning of the uprising, on 16 March 2011. They have up until now played up an important role within the grassroots committees and in the development of peaceful actions against the regime. The General Commission of the Syrian Revolution, a coalition of local committees, was headed notably by Suhair Atassi, a long-term opposition activist from a prestigious political family and moderator of the Forum Jamal Attassi, prohibited by the regime in 2000. She was held for ten days following the demonstration of 16 March 2011, of which she was accused of being one of the organizers. She now lives in exile, after having spent months in hiding. The Coordination of Local Committees (CLC), another important body, is led by the lawyer and activist Razan Zaitoune, who has been kidnapped in 2013 December, most probably by Jaysh Al-Islam.

The regime specifically targeted these activists, who had initiated demonstrations, civil disobedience actions and campaigns in favour of strikes, because of their qualities as organizers and a democratic and secular position, which undermined the propaganda of the regime that denounced a conspiracy of armed extremist Islamist groups. Some of them were imprisoned, killed or forced into exile, even if they are nevertheless still present in spite of fierce repression. They play an important role in the ongoing revolutionary process by trying to articulate between the various forms of popular resistance to the regime.

The second and undoubtedly the most important component of the Syrian revolutionary movement is that of economically marginalized urban and rural workers, and urban employees and self-employed workers, who have borne the brunt of the implementation of neoliberal policies, in particular since the coming to power of President Bashar al-Assad. As we said before, the geography of the revolts in Idlib and Deraa, as well as in other rural areas, all historical strongholds of the Baath party which had not played a large role in the insurgency of the early 1980s, including the suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo, shows the involvement of the victims of neo-liberalism in this revolution. From this component of the current protests emerged some of those who joined the armed groups of the FSA (Free Syrian Army), first developed to defend peaceful demonstrations and since then adopting more offensive

policies.

Similarly, we can see groups of protesters who opposed the regime around sheikhs in certain neighbourhoods and some tribes in some regions. That is why many of them were arrested, while others have had to flee the country. Finally, elements of the more “traditional” opposition are also involved in the popular movement, among them some Kurdish parties, left-wing groups, nationalists, liberals and Islamists.

From the beginning of the revolution, the main forms of organization have been the people’s coordination committees at the level of villages, neighbourhoods, cities and regions. These popular committees were the real spearhead of the movement, mobilizing the people for the demonstrations. Subsequently, in the areas liberated from the yoke of the regime they have developed forms of self-organization based on the organization of the masses. Popular elected councils have emerged to manage these liberated regions, proving that it is the regime that caused the anarchy, and not the people.

In some regions liberated from the armed forces of the regime, civil administrations have also been put in place to compensate for the absence of the state and to fulfil its role in many areas, such as schools, hospitals, roads, and water, electricity and communications services. These civilian administrations are appointed through elections by popular consensus and have for their main tasks the provision of services like administration and law and order.

**We would like you to speak us about Free Syrian Army: How was it formed? Was it tied to specific political forces? Did it receive any financial support from other states? And finally why was it dissolved?**

Organised armed resistance only started in July 2011 with the establishment of the Free Syrian Army and Movement of Free Officers. Several elements fostered the emergence of armed groups after more than seven months of demonstrations and peaceful resistance. In the first place, the violent repression of the regime against peaceful demonstrators and against the leaders of the popular movement, killed, arrested or forced into exile. This radicalized the movement and helped to push forward activists more inclined to resist with weapons. More and more groups of citizens took up arms to defend their demonstrations and their homes against the chabihas [militiamen paid by the regime, perpetrators of countless abuses], the security services and the army.

In the second place, the increasing number of desertions from the army, in particular of ranking soldiers refusing to fire on peaceful demonstrators. The reluctance of soldiers to fire on peaceful protests provoked many mutinies and desertions. It is also necessary to mention the willingness of the regime to militarize the revolution by leaving weapons on the fields of battle or by increasing the number of weapons on the market and/or lowering the price of weapons to justify the discourse of the regime that they were fighting against armed extremist groups.

And finally, there was the willingness of political currents and/or states, notably private donors and networks in the Gulf monarchies, with the approval of their ruling classes, to fund specific armed groups to strengthen the support they had or establish relays on the ground. The various fundings from Saudi Arabia and Qatar have actually made problems to unify the armed opposition, while various groups were competing to try to get funded by these states and adopting increasingly for some an Islamic discourse to please their sponsors.

The members of the groups of the armed opposition of the FSA originated socially from the majority component of the revolutionary movement: mainly marginalized workers of the cities and the countryside, members of the subaltern and middle classes who have suffered from the acceleration of neo-liberal economic policies since the arrival in power of Bashar al-Assad. In the groups of the armed opposition, there are also soldiers who have deserted to be found as well of the military who have defected, and civilians who have decided to take up arms, the latter being much in the majority.

The Syrian army was structured at the time of Hafez el-Assad, which explains why collective insubordination or mutiny is very difficult. The structure of the high command is based on clientelism and sectarianism. Most of the units loyal to Assad are dominated by Alawite officers, even if they also include Sunni officers. The role assigned to these units is to protect the regime by applying various forms of repression. Mostly, those who want to defect can only act individually or in small groups, leaving the ranks with or without their weapons.

These difficulties did not, however, prevent the development of desertions. The regime has thus been compelled to secure its units by the integration of new elements from the security apparatus. Thousands of soldiers and officers have been imprisoned as suspected of sympathy with the revolution. According to some testimonies, up to half of the losses suffered by the Syrian army have resulted from murders perpetrated by soldiers loyal to the regime. The regime subsequently set up armed civilian groups, called popular defence committees, to assist it in its suppression, while also receiving massive military and economic assistance from Iran and Russia, while armed Shiite groups, including Hezbollah and Iraqi groups, have continued to increase their number of combatants in Syria. Hezbollah has participated in many military operations with the Syrian army, sometimes even playing a leadership role at the military level.

In many regions of the country, revolutionary councils were formed, as well as coordinating committees of political and armed actions. A code of good conduct respecting international law and rejecting sectarianism has been signed by a large part of the armed groups that are part of the popular resistance. These measures were taken in response to acts of torture and murders committed by the armed opposition groups, often without links with the FSA, which have been condemned by the popular movement and the vast majority of the battalions of the FSA.

The FSA has never been a unified institution. It is rather the collective designation of independent armed groups, localized in various regions of the country. These groups do not have adequate arms or funding.

In 2012, the Coordination of Local Committees (CLC) analyzed the situation of the FSA in the following terms: "The fate of our Revolution has been entrusted to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), composed of deserters and civilians who bear arms to defend themselves. This group is devoid of any sustainable basis and does not have a unified command. At the same time, the FSA has remarkably and courageously defended unarmed civilians and their living areas with light weapons and little ammunition. As could be expected, the war machine of the repressive regime has been able to concentrate its repression and anger on the residents of these areas where the FSA has taken a position. The war machine of the regime has carried out acts of reprisal that have doubled the number of victims, resulting in humanitarian crises and causing the appearance of disaster zones in many regions of the country".

In addition, the lack of organized and broad support for the FSA has led to a lack of effective leadership of the armed opposition, while the Islamist groups unrelated to the FSA and funded much more massively by Gulf monarchies and some private networks have continued to expand. The opposition consists currently of more than 1000 armed groups with multiple and varied alliances according to regions and contextual dynamic. Some FSA groups have nevertheless been the target of the jihadists, particularly the Islamic State in the Levant and Iraq (ISIS) now renamed Islamic State (IS) but also Jabhat al Nusra (the official branch of Al Qaeda today in Syria) and some Islamist groups who have murdered some of its officers and attacked some of its brigades.

In addition to this, we have to note the absence or the lack of any kind of "large," organized and decisive military assistance of the USA and/or Western states to the Syrian revolutionaries, showing again the lack of will for any radical change in Syria. The Wall Street Journal published an article in January 2015 on this CIA aid saying:

"Some weapons shipments were so small that commanders had to ration ammunition. One of the U.S.'s favorite trusted commanders got the equivalent of 16 bullets a month per fighter. Rebel leaders were told they had to hand over old antitank missile launchers to get new ones" and couldn't get shells for captured tanks. When they

appealed last summer for ammo to battle fighters linked to al Qaeda, the U.S. said “no.”

In addition, the United States has opposed since the beginning of the uprising to supply various FSA forces with anti-aircraft missiles capable of taking down warplanes.

The plan of Barack Obama's, which was approved by the U.S. Congress of \$500 million to arm and equip 5,000-10,000 Syrian rebels, but was never implemented, was not aimed at overthrowing the Assad regime, as we can read in the text of the resolution:

“The Secretary of Defence is authorized, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to provide assistance, including training, equipment, supplies, and sustenance, to appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition and other appropriately vetted Syrian groups and individuals for the following purposes:

Defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition.

Protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria.

Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria.”

This program has been a total a failure. “The program is much smaller than we hoped,” conceded the Pentagon's policy chief, Christine Wormuth, saying there were between 100 and 120 fighters currently being trained, while adding that they were also “getting terrific training.” A top military general told Congress that the U.S. had successfully trained just “four or five” opposition soldiers.

The chief of staff of the US-trained Syrian rebel group Division 30 actually resigned from his position and withdrew from the program, on Sept. 19, 2015. Citing problems such as “the lack of sufficient numbers of trainees,” and “the lack of seriousness in the implementation of the project to establish the 30th brigade.” The other problem faced with the United States to constitute armed groups in Syria loyal to their interests was and is also thwarted by the reality on the ground. This is because of the decision of a large majority of opposition groups to cooperate with Washington only if they are able to maintain their independence and autonomous decision-making, and if the collaboration includes a clear plan for the overthrow of the Assad regime.

In October 2015, even Senator Lindsey Graham challenged Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair General Joseph Dunford on the U.S. strategy in Syria. He asked about the possibility of overthrowing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, saying, “This is a half-assed strategy at best.”

### **What was the political and military influence of the different Islamic organizations especially regarding the Muslim Brotherhood? Under which conditions did ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra develop and what is the social base of these organizations?**

The Muslim Brotherhoods were not present at the beginning of the revolution, at least not as a party, like most of the political parties actually. In 2009, they actually ceased opposition o the regime and were seeking forms of understanding with the regime. They even were slogans in various areas of Syria saying, “We're not Salafists. We're not Muslim Brotherhood. We're just Syrians who want freedom.” This was because the regime was accusing all of the demonstrators of being Salafists, Muslim Brotherhood or Islamic extremists. A month after the beginning of the uprising, they officially supported the popular movement.

Regarding, the development of other Islamic fundamentalist organisations much more extremists, we should remember that From March to October 2011, while the regime was targeting and repressing democrats and the popular movements, the Assad regime released up to 1500 of the most well connected salafist activists from its prisons. Regarding the jihadist presence in Syria, this phenomenon was increasing in the years prior of the revolution, especially after the US war on Iraq in 2003, reaching up to 8,000 prior the revolution. Many of them were operating freely in Syria following the invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003. The regime let them go through Syria to fight in Iraq and even collaborated with some of these groups. At the beginning of the uprising, many of those jihadists were then liberated as I said from prisons and were able to organise and expand their influence, while the regime was crushing democratic and secular activists. The rise of ISIS and other fundamentalist groups with the strategy of the Assad regime to give only one alternative to the Syrian people: me or the IS, Jabhat al Nusra and the others... The whole majority of the leadership of different Islamic fundamentalist battalions were inside prison at the beginning of the revolution

Janhat Al Nusra (the Al Qaeda branch in Syria) did their first terrorist operations in the end of summer 2011 and officially announced its creation in January 2012. Other groups such as Ahrar Sham and Jaysh Islam developed also at this moment between the summer 2011 and beginning of 2012. At the beginning they were small armed groups.

These groups were able to expand as I said because the regime was concentrating on the repression of democratic activists and the popular movement on one side and FSA groups, while in the same time the salafist jihadist groups were more organized, notably because of their past experiences in Iraq and other countries, than FSA forces, which many groups were ill organized and for some falling into misbehavior as well, and better funded (private networks of the Gulf monarchies and directly sometimes from Gulf Monarchies) abling them to recruit people that were previously in FSA forces. The subventions and delivery of certain necessary products and services to popular classes missing of everything also able them to attract some sympathies from popular classes.

In addition to all this, the regime's terrible and murderous repression, while it used of sectarianism (through medias, sectarian massacres of sunnis, etc...) and the assistance of sectarian islamic fundamentalist powers such as Iran and groups such as Hezbollah and Iraqi Shi'a militias, radicalized many people towards extremist groups.

**The transformation of the Syrian revolution into a civil war has also made Syria into a field of regional and international imperialist antagonisms which have culminated in the Russian intervention. In analyzing the situation a large part of the left considers that the USA, EU and their regional allies have supported the Syrian revolution because they want to overthrow the Assad regime which is considered as having anti-imperialist characteristics. We would like to have your opinion on the relations of Assad regime with the big imperialist powers.**

I first believe that we should analyse a State on its class basis and policies as rightly put by Pierre Frank, a French Trotskyist that wrote that: "Let us note that the greatest theoreticians of Marxism did not at all define the political nature of a bourgeois regime by the positions which the latter held in the field of foreign policy but solely and simply by the position it occupied in relation to the classes composing the nation". On this issue I think that I have showed that the Assad regime is a capitalist and authoritarian regime repressing the popular classes. But nevertheless let's answer to the people saying it's an "anti imperialist" regime.

The Syrian regime has been presented as an anti-imperialist state through its support for the resistance in Lebanon and in Palestine for many years now, and has taken strong rhetorical positions in opposition to Israel. But this stance is not based on anti-imperialist principles, but on putative 'national interests'. These are guided by the necessity of ensuring the security and continuity of the regime as well as a balance of power in diplomatic negotiations with Israel to recover the Golan Heights area seized in 1967.

The regime has actually collaborated with western imperialist governments on many occasions. It was actually Hafez Al-Assad as Minister of Defence that refused to assist the Palestinians and progressive Jordanian groups in overthrowing the conservative Hashemite regime in Jordan during the popular uprising in 1970, known as the Black September.

This is the same regime that crushed the Palestinians and the progressive movements in Lebanon in 1976 with the tacit agreement of the Western States by supporting the fascist groups of the Lebanese Phalange, putting an end to their uprising, and participating in the Palestinian massacre of Tell Zaatar. It then supported the Fatah al-Intifada's split from Fatah in 1983 and supported the Lebanese Shi'a movement Amal in War of the Camps between 1985 and 89 against the Palestinians.

The Assad regime was only the main actor behind the weakening of the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF), commonly known by its Arab acronym as Jammul, which was established in 1982 by the Lebanese Communist Party, the Organisation of the Communist Action Lebanon, the Arab Socialist Action Party Lebanon (ASAP-L) and the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP). This new coalition had the objective of replacing the Lebanese National Movement, but above all to resist the Israeli occupation. By the spring of 1985, the LNRF had succeeded in driving the Israelis out of the western Bekaa, Rashaya and other large areas in the South. The leadership of the Front then decided to bring the fight to the Israelis by attacking targets inside the "security belt," the highly militarized strip of territory along Lebanon's southern border that the Israelis used as a buffer zone. Nevertheless, this period was the beginning of the end of the LNRF, which was the target of not only Israel, but also the Syrian regime following the refusal of the LNRF's leadership to submit to the demands of "coordination" with Syria. In addition, from 1984, economic assistance to the LNRF from the USSR and Arab countries was ceased.

In the mid 1980s the LNRF's leadership was subject to a wave of assassinations that were attributed to Islamic forces close to Hezbollah, and also to Amal. At the same time, according to Elias Atallah (then the LNRF's top commander), Amal and Hezbollah would frequently inform the Syrians of any LNRF plans they caught wind of. The LNRF's resistance attacks became less frequent and less successful (Nash 2008).

The internal fighting between leftist groups – including remaining PLO elements and the Druze PSP – and Amal in the Lebanese capital in 1987 also weakened the LNRF, while the entry of Syrian forces into West Beirut increasingly prevented the LNRF's frame of actions.

After Amal suspended most of its resistance activities following Israel's first withdrawal in 1985, and because the Syrian regime progressively prevented with all its capacities all of the LNRF's resistance activities, Hezbollah gradually became the sole resistance movement, strongly supported by the Syrian and Iranian regimes (Traboulsi 2007:230). The Ta'if agreement then acknowledged Hezbollah as the sole resistance actor. The Islamic party with its close ties to Tehran would therefore carry the resistance torch, but only if it coordinated closely with Damascus.

The Assad regime participated in the imperialist war against Iraq in 1991 with the coalition led by the US.

They also participated in the 'war on terror' launched by President George W. Bush by collaborating on security issues. Israel has actually several times called on the US to ease the pressure on the Syrian regime, which has not shot a single bullet for the occupied Golan Heights since 1973.

Syria has not responded to direct attacks on its soil widely attributed to Israel. It also has engaged in multiple rounds of peace talks, most recently in 2008. Although these talks have not yielded an agreement, their repeated failure has led to nothing worse than a continued chill.

Syrian officials have repeatedly declared their readiness to sign a peace agreement with Israel as soon as the occupation of the Golan Heights ended, while nothing was said on the Palestinian issue. Rami Makhoul, the cousin of Bashar Al Assad, went so far as to declare in May 2011 that if there is no stability in Syria, there will be no stability in Israel, adding that no one can guarantee what will occur if something happens to the Syrian regime. As a result, it is not hard to understand Israel's satisfaction with the status quo under the current Syrian regime.

In addition to all this, I would like to remind that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton characterised at the beginning of the uprising in Syria the dictator Bashar Al Assad as a "reformer" and added that "many of the members of Congress of both parties who have gone to Syria in recent months have said they believe he's a reformer". This is without forgetting the invitation to the national palace of the Elysée by French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008.

The Assad regime has also been targeting Palestinians in Syria since the beginning of the revolution. In the first week of the uprising, Buthaina Shaaban, Bashar al-Assad's adviser, held responsible Palestinians for the crisis and accused Palestinians in the Deraa and Latakia camps of responsibility for the anti-regime protests and spreading chaos in those towns...

The Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk has been suffering of strict siege imposed on it from summer 2013, with the prohibition of movement of persons and foodstuffs, to the rebel neighbourhoods south of Damascus by the Assad regime and the Palestinian organizations linked to it, especially the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), controlled by Ahmad Jibril.

The Assad regime has also killed and imprisoned thousands of Palestinians in Syria, while more than 20,000 are wanted by the security services.

So as we can see it is far from being any anti imperialist force.

### **What do you believe are the imperialists' goals regarding their intervention in the Syrian civil war and how have these been modified after the intensification of the Russian imperialistic intervention?**

Firstly , I would like to say that the objectives of the USA and Western powers since the beginning of the uprising in Syria have never been to overthrow the Assad regime. The USA has tried on the opposite to reach an agreement between the Assad regime (or section of it) and the opposition linked to Western, Turkey and Gulf regimes, represented today by the Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces.

This "Yemeni type solutions" maintains the structure of old regimes and guarantee the neo-liberal and imperialist order that was existing prior 2011.

We can see this through the past years policies of the USA regarding Syria, while not forgetting that at the beginning of the uprising the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton characterized the dictator Bashar al-Assad as a "reformer" and added that "many of the members of Congress of both parties who have gone to Syria in recent months have said they believe he's a reformer."

In 2011, as the regime continued the crack down on protests and soldiers began to peel away from the army, U.S. intelligence officials identified officers from Mr. Assad's minority Alawite sect who potentially could lead a regime change. Washington's policy in 2011 was to get to the point of a transition in Syria by finding cracks in the regime and offering incentives for people to abandon Assad, but regime cohesiveness held, and the crackdown intensified. In August 2011, Mr. Obama publicly called for Mr. Assad to step down, but without changing the core of its policy regarding Syria as we explained above: the regime must be maintained with only superficial changes.

As we can see in the Geneva guidelines of June 30 2012, which was agreed to unanimously by the Permanent five 5 members of the UN Security Council, it would be permissible for Assad to serve on the transitional governing body. Indeed, he could preside over it. All that was required was the consent of the opposition delegation. Similarly, delegates representing the Syrian Arab Republic—the regime and the government—could withhold consent to persons nominated by the opposition.

“The United States and our partners are not seeking so-called regime change,” Kerry told reporters mid December in the Russian capital after meeting President Vladimir Putin.

In January, the Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces cast doubt on whether it would go to Geneva 3 for the “peace negotiations,” because they notably accused the United States of adopting unacceptable Iranian and Russian ideas for solving the conflict.

Regarding other Western imperialist states, they also have not been interested in regime change, and moreover following the terrorist attack of November 13, 2015 in Paris. France has now taken the lead in this “war against Daech” and increased its airstrikes since the attacks of November 13, and now mobilizes 3500 soldiers, deploying in the eastern Mediterranean the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, therefore tripling since November 23 its capacity for action. Britain and Germany have joined the campaign as well.

France also called for more collaboration with the Russian state. On November 26, 2015, the French and Russian governments announced their decision to “coordinate” their strikes against Daech in Syria, and in particular to target the transport of petroleum products.

Israeli military sources have also repeatedly declared the existence of a consensus within Tel Aviv’s decision making circles over the importance of the continuation of the Assad regime. Military affairs commentator Alon Ben-David quoted a source within the Israeli Joint Chiefs of Staff as saying: “Although no one in Israel can say this publicly and explicitly, the best option for Israel would be for the Assad regime to remain and for the internal fighting to continue for as long as possible.”

The French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has also declared December 5, 2015 that it no longer planned the departure of Bashar al-Assad before a political transition in Syria, adding that “the fight against Daech is decisive but will be fully effective only if all Syrian and regional forces unite.” John Kerry, Foreign Minister of the United States said they could imagine a collaboration between the army of the Assad regime and the military forces of the opposition, the FSA, to work against extremist organizations such Daech without the departure from Assad.

The agreement of the imperialist states to fight “against the terrorism” of Daech has nevertheless not reduce disagreements and rivalries between different regional and international imperialist actors as we have seen between Turkey and Russia.

Regarding Russia, the propaganda around the campaign of the “war against terrorism” launched by the Russian state is a way to support the Assad regime politically and militarily and crush all forms of opposition to it. Putin wants the various international imperialist actors in the West to consider Assad as the ruler that can help them in their fight against “terrorism.”

Russia has long supplied Assad armed forces with the vast majority of their weaponry. The Russian state has continued to ship substantial volumes of small arms, ammunition, spare parts and refurbished material to pro-regime forces. In January 2014, Russia stepped up supplies of military gear to the Syrian regime, including armored vehicles, drones and guided bombs.

In the end of summer 2015, Russia greatly expanded its military involvement on the side of the Assad regime, including providing serious training and logistical support to the Syrian army. On Sept. 17, 2015, the regime's army started using new types of air and ground weapons supplied by Russia, while satellite photos taken in mid-September showed Russian forces developing two additional military facilities close to Lattakiyya. On Sept. 30, Russian reached a new level with the beginning of its direct military intervention to save the Assad regime. A report published by the Center for Documentation of Violations in Syria, wrote that since the beginning of the Russian military, Sept. 30, until Nov. 15, 80% to 90% of Russian strikes have not targeted areas controlled by Daech, while more than 520 civilians were killed by the Russian airstrikes. About more than 100,000 civilians have been forced to flee their regions because of Russian bombings. Russian bombings also destroyed dozens of hospitals and doctors and patients were killed in these raids.

Moscow might have targeted more jihadists after the attacks in Paris but continues to bomb massively areas not controlled by Daech, mostly Islamist fundamentalist forces, FSA groups and civilians. For example on Nov. 28, 2015, the Russian military aviation destroyed in central Idlib province an aid dispensary containing a bakery that produced over 300,000 pounds of bread per month and a well providing safe-drinking water to an estimated 50,000 people. Many popular neighborhoods in Aleppo and Idlib and their countryside have also been the targets of Russian bombing.

A report of Amnesty, published on Dec. 23, 2015, focused on six attacks in Homs, Idlib and Aleppo between September and November 2015 in which at least 200 civilians and around a dozen fighters were killed. On January 20, 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights announced that Russian airstrikes, which started on 30 September 2015, have killed 1,015 civilians, including more than 200 children.

The objectives of these airstrikes are clear: save and consolidate the political and military power of the Assad regime. Russian President Vladimir Putin actually said on September 28, before the beginning of the Russian airstrikes: "There is no other way to settle the Syrian conflict other than by strengthening the existing legitimate government agencies, support them in their fight against terrorism". In other words crush all forms of opposition, whether democratic or reactionary, to the Assad regime under the so called "war on terror". All authoritarian regimes have used this same kind of propaganda to repress popular movements and/ or opposition groups to their powers: Assad against the popular movement since day 1 of the popular uprising, Sissi in Egypt to repress particularly the Muslim Brotherhoods, but also progressive left and democratic movements such as the Revolutionary Socialists, Movement of April 6, etc... Erdogan against the PKK and various leftist movements, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia against the protesters and popular movements challenging their power, etc...

International Imperialist powers have not been different, from the Russian State repressing any forms of resistance in Tchetchenia to its occupation and the USA's various military interventions across the world. Both were and are claiming to fight against terrorism.

The time for this military expansion of Assad's regime allies led by Russia is led by two main reasons: 1) the increasing political and military weakness of the Assad regime and 2) the absence or the lack of any clear policy from Western powers to assist the revolutionaries in Syria.

Despite their rivalry, imperialist and sub imperialist interventions nevertheless share a common purpose today: to liquidate the revolutionary movement initiated in March 2011, stabilize the regime in Damascus in keeping at the head its criminal dictator (for a short and medium term at least), and try to militarily defeat the IS.

We must not imagine that the imperialist rivalries at the global level between the United States, China and Russia would be insurmountable for these powers, to the extent that these powers are in reality in relations of interdependence on many issues. All these regimes are bourgeois regimes that are and always will be the enemies

of the popular revolutions, seeking to impose or strengthen a stable political context allowing them to accumulate and develop their political and economic capital in defiance of the popular classes. No regional or international power is a friend of the Syrian revolution as we have shown, just as it is not the imperialist contradictions that have been the source of the uprising in Syria or elsewhere as well in the region, but the political and socio-economic frustrations endured by the popular classes.

**The analysis which seems to dominate today (even in part of the left) is that the most dangerous enemy – not only in the Middle East but also in Europe – is the ISIS. It seems that the USA and the EU have accepted that Assad stays in power at least for a transitional period. How is this accepted by their regional allies, Saudi Arabia and Turkey?**

Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar on their sides, are the states that want the most to see the fall of the Assad family, but not of the regime and its institutions. The monarchies of the Gulf and private networks within these countries have wanted to transform this popular revolution into a sectarian civil war because they fear a democratic Syria and a propagation of the revolution in the region that would threaten their power and interests. As a reminder Saudi Arabia and Qatar enjoyed good relations with the Assad regime before the uprising in 2011. They supported politically and economically mostly Islamic fundamentalist movements such as Jabhat Al-Nusra, Ahrar Sham, Army of Islam and other similar groups that have a sectarian and reactionary ideology in total opposition to the spirit of the revolution, although Saudi Arabia also supported at some periods some Free Syrian Army groups (Syrian Revolutionary Front and Haraka Hazm both which were defeated by Jabhat Al Nusra, or also Syrian Southern Front) against Jihadist groups such as Jabhat Al Nusra and ISIS. The Islamic Fundamentalist groups also attempt to reduce the role of the popular committees, sometimes through violent ways. They also propagated a sectarian religious discourse through their various medias.

The transformation of the nature of the revolution into a sectarian war would also able them to scare their own populations in the following way: all changes in the region are susceptible to result in a sectarian war and we should therefore encourage the status quo, in other words, the maintenance of these dictatorial powers.

But let's look more precisely to the interests of each of these states, which were all friends to the Assad regime prior to the revolution.

The Turkish state does not want to see the influence of the PKK in Syria extend all along the border with Turkey and it therefore supports the coalition of the Army of the Conquest, dominated by Jabhat Al Nusra and Ahrar Sham. The latter two groups, but especially Jabhat Al Nusra, have since 2013, launched many attacks against the forces of PYD and committed human rights violations and abuses against Kurdish civilians, in addition to other Syrian Arab groups and civilians.

The Turkish government also reiterated once more that the PKK and Daech were similar in its eyes. The Turkish Prime Minister also declared that Ankara would not hesitate to bomb the PYD (Syrian PKK) forces in Syria as it has bombed the PKK in northern Iraq.

The US and Turkey have been discussing for months to work together against Daech present in these regions close to the Turkish and Syrian border, but there has been no progress until today on this issue.

Finally, Turkey, which tried in these past years to play a role of mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia, has increasingly come closer to the Saudi kingdom, despite some still persisting differences. Since January 2015, with the change of leadership in Saudi Arabia, Erdogan visited the Saudi kingdom three times. At the end of 2015, the two countries decided to establish a "strategic cooperation council." The AKP government has largely supported the

Saudi military intervention in Yemen against the Houthis, backed by Iran, and military groups linked to former dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh, which has resulted in the killing of more than 5,800 persons, including 2,800 civilians, and of more than 27,900 injured, while over 2.5 million people are displaced within the country. Ankara has also agreed to join the military alliance established by the Saudi kingdom in December 2015 and composed of more than 30 countries against Daech.

In early 2016, Erdogan rejected criticism directed against Riyadh after the execution of the Saudi opponent Sheikh Nimr Nimr, describing it as “an internal legal issue.” The pro-government medias in Turkey have also followed the example of Turkish President Erdogan and openly supported Saudi Arabia in the conflict with Iran.

Early December, following a visit to Qatar, President Erdogan also announced that it has signed an agreement with Qatar for the supply of liquefied petroleum gas in addition to the establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar.

The unconditional support of Iran in the Syrian revolutionary process to the criminal Assad regime has also brought Turkey closer to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies in supporting primarily Islamic fundamentalist groups and also promoting a sectarian religious discourse.

Regarding, Saudi Arabia, it is wrong to think that the Saudi kingdom funds or support Daech, it's not the case. The executions of January 2nd, which included Saudi opposition member Sheikh Nimr, were actually also directed against another group that worries the Saudi kingdom: jihadist movements such as Al-Qaeda and Daech. The executions of Riyadh of the 43 jihadists members of Al-Qaida, condemned for bombings and gun attacks in the kingdom, had indeed intended to send a clear message that any support or involvement in these movements would be repressed with the utmost firmness. The “antiterrorist coalition” composed of 34 countries, led by Saudi Arabia, announced December 14, 2015, must also be understood in this perspective of fighting against jihadist movements.

Al-Qaida and Daech, which both vowed to overthrow the regime of the Saud, promised to avenge these executions. Al-Qaeda has accused Saudi Arabia of having carried out the executions “of mujahidins” in order to consolidate the rule of the Saud dynasty and as a gift to the “Crusaders”, in other words the Western allies Riyadh, for the new year.

The branch of Al-Qaeda in Yemen had already threatened in December 2015 to “shed the blood of the soldiers of Al-Saud” if its members were executed, while in early 2016, Daech threatened to destroy Saudi Arabian prisons holding jihadists after the executions. Both organizations are fighting against Saudi Arabia, which has declared them terrorist groups and locked up thousands of their supporters. Daech has claimed responsibility for a series of bombings and shootings in Saudi Arabia since November 2014 that have killed more than 50 people, most of them Shi'as but also more than 15 members of the security forces.

Al-Qaida has on its side began its terrorist actions within the Saudi kingdom since 2003, killing several hundred people. The organization of Al-Qaeda has “excommunicated” the Saudi kingdom, considering it as un-Islamic, especially for its collaboration and associations with “infidels” States in the war against Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban.

This war between on one side the Saudi kingdom and the other side Al-Qaeda and Daech must not however make us believe that their fundamentalist and reactionary ideologies would fundamentally be different. The Saudi kingdom has declared for years that the ideology of these organizations is foreign to its country and institutions, but is the result of the radicalization of the Muslim Brotherhood's movement and of the writings of Sayyeb Qutb and Ayman al-Zawahiri. This explanation does not convince anyone, and have stopped for a while now. Sayyeb Qutb and Ayman al-Zawahiri are of course sources of inspiration for some forms of jihadisms, but ultra fundamentalists movements such as Al Qaeda and Daech find already and in a much deeper way an ideological breeding ground within the

official Wahhabi discourse broadcasted by clergy and institutions of the Saudi kingdom. As a reminder, the Saudi official speech denounce secular ideologies such as Arab nationalism (considered “as an atheist” jahaliyya “(ignorance), a movement of ignorance whose main purpose is to fight Islam and destroy its teachings and rules... All Arabs adopting it are enemies of Islam... Arab nationalism is European in origin, Jewish in motivation... Arab nationalism is a conspiracy promoted by the West and Zionism to undermine the unity of Muslims”) and communism (considered as a “movement leading to the enslavement of the individual by materialism and the abandonment of moral and spiritual qualities”), while the danger of “al-taghrib” (Westernization) “leads to the loss of Islamic ideals and practices”. Politically, westernisation is understood as the adoption of “Western political system, political parties and parliaments at the expense of cohesion and social consensus”. Socially, Westernization undermines the Muslims conduct and leads to the mixing between men and women, the opening of bars and nightclubs, celebrating non-Muslim holidays such as Mother’s Day, Christmas, or Labour Day. Many of these themes are now found in the propaganda of Daech and Al-Qaeda.

A number of Saudi jihadists takes as references the earlier texts of Wahabism, which are the sources of official Islam in the country, and other authors of Wahabi references, but with different interpretations.

More generally, the main source of recruitment of these organizations in Saudi Arabia is in political and socio economic reasons: in the authoritarian nature of the regime and the absence of democracy, the fierce repression of all forms of opposition to the ruling family, social inequality, poverty and growing unemployment, especially among the youth, alliance and collaboration with the imperialist Western powers committing crimes against other Arab and Muslim populations, etc ... Once more, we have to understand that these movements are rooted in our present and modern time, not in a distant history. These are the products of the current modernity in which these populations live.

**We would like your opinion about Kobani. In your articles you say that it is an obligation for the internationalist left to support the right of autonomy for the Kurds and more specifically the Kurdish movement in Kobani. However you have also often criticized aspects of the policy of the leadership of this movement. What are the positive elements in your opinion and what elements should be criticized?**

Regarding the three cantons of Rojava, many interesting things are occurring on many aspects (women’s rights, minority participation, secular institutions, etc...), especially in a war situation. These experiences of autonomy are moreover positive for a Kurdish nation oppressed for decades, especially as all revolutionary socialist must support the self determination of the Kurdish people in Syria and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, some contradictions exist in Rojava, which do not represent an example of self-organization from below of the popular masses, but are rather processes controlled from above. First, we must address the authoritarian practices of Syrian branch of PKK (PYD), both in their internal organizational functioning and against other citizens and political actors. The authoritarianism of the PYD was demonstrated in its repression and imprisonment of activists and the closure of organizations or institutions critical of them.

In fact, there have been several protests against the PYD forces and their practices in some cities in Rojava such as Amouda and Derabissyat. In the end of June 2013 for example, the two cities have experienced demonstrations and other protest activities to denounce the repression and arrest of Kurdish revolutionary activists by YPG (Units of protection of the people), the armed wing of the PYD. In July 2013, new events occurred in Amouda the PYD did not hesitate to fire on the crowd, killing many demonstrators. Furthermore, since October 2014, mandatory conscription was decreed and implemented by the PYD in areas under its control. This decision has caused the departure of many young people from all communities, to escape imprisonment for refusing to serve.

Some protests were organised in recent weeks by the inhabitants of Amouda to condemn both the abduction of women and their enslavement by the IS on one side and on the other side the forced military conscription of young

girls in the PYD -with the special case of Hemri Aidi, a young girl of 15 enlisted by force. YPG forces have actually repeatedly enlisted children in their ranks.

We should also not forget the distrust displayed by the PKK and the PYD to popular protest movement in the past when they were not launched on their initiatives or controlled the party. The PKK for example displayed a passive attitude during the Kurdish intifada in Syria in 2004, seeking more to calm the Kurds who rose up against the oppression of the Assad regime, or at the beginning of the Syrian revolutionary process in 2011. The PKK actually currently coexist in the cities of Qamishli and Hasaka with the forces of the Syrian regime and is not trying to get rid of.

Similarly in 2013 during the popular mobilizations in Turkey following the issue of the Gezi Park, the PKK carefully avoided any statement on the popular protests, while many Kurdish activists joined individually protesters in Istanbul and other large cities that had joined the protests. In Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city in Turkey, the number of demonstrations was relatively low. The PKK favoured at the time the consolidation and continuation of the peace process with the government of the AKP in 2012, which was severely challenged since then in view of the continued repression of the PKK and Kurdish activists in Turkey and the attitude of the Turkish government regarding Kobani.

These elements demonstrate the preference of the PKK to change from above and controlled by the party, rather than by changes from below and through mass popular movements.

Although Kurdish youth participated in large numbers in the Syrian uprising since 2011, the PKK has sought a middle path between the regime and its opposition since the beginning of the Syrian revolutionary process in 2011. The PKK actually currently coexist in the cities of Qamishli and Hasakah with the forces of the Syrian regime and is not trying to get rid of them. Some relations still exist with the regime's armed forces, but also with some groups of the Free Syrian army. PYD leader, Saleh Muslim, has also welcomed Russian military intervention in Syria in October 2015, while some time PYD forces benefited of some Russian bombing to conquer new territories on FSA forces. The PYD also announced its plans to open an office in Moscow on February 10, while preparing to open another in Berlin, with Washington, Paris and Arab countries coming later.

In addition, following the complete failure to assist FSA democratic forces, the USA decided this summer to support the newly formed Kurdish-majority alliance known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) established in October 2015 officially according its statement as a response to fight the "terrorism represented by the Islamic State, its sister [organizations] and the criminal Baath regime". This new group is dominated by YPG (armed wing of the PYD, the Syrian branch of the PKK), while other groups (Syriac and FSA groups like the army of revolutionaries "Jaysh al-thuwar") within it play until today an auxiliary role. The SDF was established to provide a legal and political cover for American military support for the PKK affiliated group PYD in Syria. The USA considers the PYD as the most effective actor to fight Daech.

The USA is hoping that other FSA groups will join the SDF alliance, but the policies of the PYD, particularly of non-conflict with the Assad regime and expressing on different occasions its acceptance of a political transition in which Assad could remain, and also violations of Human Rights and abuses in some areas against Arab civilians, prevent any trusty relationship to be established and created tensions with local populations. This does not mean that the Assad regime and PYD are allies, not at all, but rather that PYD is tactically collaborating with various actors according to various elements (geography, particular periods, etc...)

In the same time, some pressure is also mounted on PYD and Kurdish forces to collaborate directly and on a systematic way, and not punctually, with regime forces against Daech by Russia, it's other political supporter. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei actually said on December 23, 2015 that "Moscow is ready to back Kurdish forces fighting ISIS in Syria, but only in coordination with the Syrian government". PYD is facing contradictory interests by

Russia and the USA, both actors supporting politically the PYD and officials from both countries visited Rojava.

Of course we should denounce the various sections of the Syrian opposition that still deny the right to self-determination of the Kurdish people. The National Coalition for the Syrian Revolution and opposition forces, supported by the Western states, Turkey, and the Gulf monarchies, had an ambiguous attitude during the attacks of the reactionary Islamic forces, including Jabhat al Nusra in the Kurdish regions in the past. The current president of the Syrian coalition Khaled Khouja even said that the victory of the AKP in the parliamentary elections of November was a ray of hope for the Arab peoples, despite the violations of democratic rights, crackdown on various sectors of the opposition and especially against the Kurdish population of the ruling party AKP, while George Sabra president of Syrian National Council declared that the PKK was a terrorist organization in January 2016 in an interview on Al-Jazeera.

These positions are all the more reprehensible, considering the decades of political, social and cultural oppression of the Kurdish people in Syria and policies of colonization or Arabisation implemented by the Assad regime in the northern regions of Syria. The northern regions of Syria were also the poorest and the least provided with social services. This is not to mention the silence of a large part of the opposition during the Kurdish intifada in Syria in 2004. Some even accused it of serving foreign "imperialist" projects in order to weaken Syria.

This is in addition to the continued repression of the PKK and Kurdish activists in Turkey and the attitude of the Turkish AKP government regarding Kobani and the terrorists attacks against the Kurds in general and the HDP party in particular, the PKK has adopted a more hostile attitude toward the AKP in order to defend itself against the war launched by the AKP government. Let us not forget the airstrikes against PKK bases and Kurdish civilians by the Turkish gov