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Syria

Nothing Israel does will serve Syrians' struggle for freedom

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Joseph Daher explains why celebrating Israel's assassination Hezbollah's Nasrallah is short sighted when it comes to Syrians' struggle against Assad's regime.

Israel's escalation of violence in Lebanon and its assassination of several Hezbollah military and political leaders, including long time secretary general Hassan Nasrallah, has led to many debates on Hezbollah's nature and political trajectory. This has also raised the important question of the right of resistance, particularly in the current context.

The vastly differing views of Hezbollah were starkly reflected in the scenes that followed Nasrallah's assassination. On one side, the party's members, supporters, and allies, expressed sadness and sorrow, while at the same time images were shared across social media of Syrians from the opposition-controlled north-western areas distributing sweets in celebration. Some supporters of the Syrian revolution also expressed joy over the massive Israeli bombing of Dahiyeh (southern Beirut).

These reactions can be largely attributed to Hezbollah's role in having assisted the Syrian regime in crushing the uprising, laying siege on cities like Madaya, forcibly displacing civilians and various other violations of human rights against civilian populations. In addition to this, a lot of Syrians recalled when it was Hezbollah's members and supporters who distributed sweets in Dahiyeh in the summer of 2013, following the capture of the city of al-Qusayr in Homs province by the Syrian army and Hezbollah against Syrian armed opposition groups.

While one can understand that the positive reactions to the assassination by Syrians opposed to the Syrian regime are a form of revenge because of Hezbollah's complicity, the context surrounding the current moment, matters. We have to be clear, Israel's war against Lebanon is not to promote the freedom of Syrians or any other population in the region suffering from authoritarian states.

A new Middle East

Israel's recent bombing campaigns in Lebanon, supported by the US, have been taking place amidst its continuous genocide in Gaza and annexation of the West Bank, and have spared no one. More than 2000 people have been killed, thousands more are injured, and considerable destruction has been caused. Not to mention, 1.2 million people have been displaced in less than a month. In an attempt to re-occupy territories of southern Lebanon through ground offensives, Israel's occupation army is also provoking wide scale destructions.

Additionally, Israeli officials from the Netanyahu to Spokesperson Avichay Adraee, who serves as the head of the Arab media division of the Israeli occupation army, have attempted to create and promote sectarian tensions among Lebanese people to potentially provoke a civil war. For example, just a few days ago Israel struck the village of Aito where mostly Christian populations live, and where internally displaced people coming from majority Shi'a areas were being welcomed. At least 22 people were killed by the bombing. This was a way to fuel more sectarian tensions amongst the Lebanese population.

More widely, Netanyahu's plans are clear: a new Middle East that bows down to US and Israel, forced to submit under harsh violence. This strategy does not include any prospect of democracy and justice for Syrians or the wider region's popular classes, quite the opposite.

In reality Israel was not in favour of the Syrian regime being overthrown, and in July 2018 Netanyahu declared no objection to Assad taking back control of the country and stabilising his power. He said Israel would only act against perceived threats, such as Iran and Hezbollah's forces and influence, explaining, "We haven't had a problem with the Assad regime, for 40 years not a single bullet was fired on the Golan Heights".

Furthermore, Israel has continuously justified these merciless bombing campaigns against civilian areas in Gaza and Lebanon by stating that Hamas or Hezbollah members or infrastructures were present. However, for Israel, all civilians in these areas are considered supporters and by extension, labelled "terrorists". In fact, Western media, which has aided and abetted this war, echoes Israeli propaganda by continuously describing these areas as Hezbollah or Hamas strongholds.

Similarly, the Syrian regime extensively bombed opposition held areas to cause massive destructions, including human casualties, and displace the local population who were opposed to the regime in order to force them into regions under their control. They destroyed the opposition's infrastructure and cut their supply lines, including through the deliberate targeting of hospitals, schools, markets, and civilians.

Preventing civilian access to basic goods and services, including humanitarian aid, was another widely employed tactic to guarantee forcible displacement, or the eventual surrendering of territory and population by the opposition. The regime also justified their campaign as fighting "jihadist terrorists".

Right to resist

Israel's war on Palestine and Lebanon is not to promote "peace" or "liberate" local populations from Hezbollah or Hamas, but to pursue its historical objectives as a settler colonial state of eliminating Palestinians through a continued Nakba and consolidating a regional order serving US imperial interests. These objectives are a mortal threat to the whole region, with no exception.

With this in mind, Palestinians and Lebanese people have the right to resist Israel's racist, colonial apartheid state violence, including through military resistance. This includes the right of Hezbollah and Hamas, which are the main actors involved in the armed confrontation with the Israeli occupation army, to resist.

After all, did Syrians not have the right to defend themselves against the military campaign led by pro-regime forces accompanied by thousands of foreign fighters led by Iran and Hezbollah, and aided by Russia aviation, to re-occupy eastern Aleppo in 2016 ? They did, because the issue at hand was opposing a war against civilians in Eastern Aleppo, and elsewhere, regardless of the reactionary nature of some parts of opposition armed groups.

However, defending the right of people to resist oppression should not be confused with support for the political projects of Hezbollah or Hamas, or the belief that these parties will be able to deliver Palestinian liberation. Just as all critiques of these political parties shouldn't be confused with "promoting" Israeli propaganda or siding with US allies.

If support is uncritical, it becomes a passive form of solidarity limited to celebrating Hezbollah, and often its main sponsor Iran. Rather, such a narrow perspective becomes an obstacle to building a wider popular resistance against Israel's war on Lebanon and/or attempts to establish regional and international solidarity.

Indeed, one of the reasons for Hezbollah's growing isolation is its defence of the sectarian and neoliberal political system in Lebanon, and serving in the interests of Iran, including through supporting the survival of the Syrian

regime.

Finally, the dividing views over Nasrallah's assassination have demonstrated the glaring absence of an independent democratic and progressive bloc that is able to organise and clearly oppose Israel's wars as well as Western imperialist interests, whilst also affirming solidarity with all oppressed peoples in the region against all authoritarian regimes and political orders.

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