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Syria

# Response to Tariq Ali 2015, or the need for internationalist solidarity

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### **Tariq Ali spoke at a Stop the War rally in London on November 28, 2015, on the need to oppose any Western interventions in Syria. He did so by propagating, again, conspiracy views and actually legitimizing Russian imperialist interventions in Syria.**

Once again, as these words came out from an important figure of the International left, I feel it is necessary to answer and contradict them and for others to see that this is not an opinion shared by all among progressive groups and personalities. Above all, it is also necessary to defend the Syrian revolution and the millions of people that have suffered for their struggle for freedom and dignity against all forms of tyrannies: firstly against the Assad regime and its allies, and then against Daech and Islamic fundamentalist forces such as Jabhat Al Nusra and others. This is why I will deconstruct several moments of the speech of Tariq Ali and demonstrate that not only his analysis and information on the Syrian revolution is plainly wrong, but that also his so called strategy to fight Daech is wrong and doomed to fail.

I had to add several other points after Tariq Ali posted on facebook a TV conference in response “For all those who have been deliberately misinterpreting my speech outside Downing Street on Wednesday, here is my position on Syria, explained at length”. [\[2\]](#) On many aspects this has not changed the key elements he expressed in the rally.

Tariq Ali started his speech by saying that we need to “get rid of the conditions that created Daech”. On this I agree completely, but I disagree strongly with Tariq Ali’s strategy, that I believe will ultimately only reinforced Daech.

He rightfully describes the US -British invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the crimes and persecutions committed by the Maliki governments against vast sections of the Iraqi Sunni population. [\[3\]](#) I would add several other reasons, which I think are important as well:

It must be remembered that the country was under the bloody dictatorship of Saddam Hussein’s clan that caused the death, exile and imprisonment of tens of thousands of people from all ethnicities and sects, not to mention the gassing of Kurds in Halabja in 1988 and the harsh repression against Shi’a population in the south of Iraq in 1991. This regime was built on a totalitarian repressive apparatus that accepted no political opposition and independent trade unions, and on a clientelist, tribal and sectarian basis.

In addition, former officers of Saddam Hussein have been massively present within the Daech. This is linked to an older process of iraqisation of al-Qaeda’s command ‘Mesopotamia’, which was part of the strategy of the Jordanian jihadist Abu Musaab Az-Zarqawi and his advisor, Abu Anas ash-Shami in the mid 2000s.

Thus, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the predecessor of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as head of Daech, was a former Iraqi colonel of gendarmerie, killed in 2010. Hajji Bakr, killed in January 2014, was a colonel. Abu Abd Ar-Rahman Al-Bilawi, killed near Mosul in June 2014, was a captain of the Republican Guard. Abu Muhannad Suwaydawi, killed at the end of 2014, Lieutenant Colonel of the Air Force Intelligence Service. All four are former officers of the Baathist regime. Finally, at a more local level of command, the nephew of Saddam Hussein, Sab’awi Ibrahim al-Hassan, killed in May 19, 2015 by a US drone strike near Baiji, also exercised responsibilities within Daech. [\[4\]](#)

The membership of this category of officers to the Ba’ath was purely utilitarian: under Saddam Hussein, no officer could seriously hope to make a career without his party card. It is this category, devoid of Baathists convictions and much more permeable to religious fundamentalist ideology, especially after the “campaign for the strengthening of

the faith” launched in 1993, that moved over to occupy leadership positions within Daech. Officially launched in 1993 by Saddam Hussein, the “campaign for the strengthening of the faith” has notably led to the implementation of prison sentences for drinking in public space, religious programs on the TV, a reinforcement of learning the Qoran, whose study was valued, in all social milieu and finally to an Islamization from all sectors of the state, including the army and the intelligence services. Saddam Hussein used to talk in the media about building the biggest mosque in the world and about writing the Quran in his own blood. The officers mentioned above joined jihadist groups in the aftermath of the fall of the Iraqi regime from the beginning of the US occupation. [5]

The Maliki government’s responsibility is indeed crucial in the rise of Daech, but it would be wrong not to talk about the role of the **Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)** as well as in its role in Iraq in supporting the successive Iraqi governments and Shi’a sectarian fundamentalist movements that committed massacres against Sunni population and continue to do so in some areas in Iraq and in Syria. Just as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the IRI has supported sectarian and reactionary fundamentalist groups to promote their own political interests, like in other countries elsewhere in the region, especially in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria.

The IRI has been the primary weapons-provider to the Assad regime. The security and intelligence services of the IRI have been advising and assisting the Assad regime since the beginning of the uprising. These efforts have evolved into an expeditionary training mission using Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces, Quds Force, intelligence services, and law enforcement forces. The IRI has been providing essential military supplies to Assad and has also been assisting pro-regime shabiha militias. The extent of IRGC-QF involvement in Syria became clearer in February 2013 when Iranian Brigadier General Hassan Shateri was assassinated in the Damascus countryside while traveling to Beirut, after having travelled to Aleppo. Shateri was a senior Quds Force commander. [6]

In June 2015, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Committee for Foreign Policy and National Security in the Iranian parliament, declared in Damascus that the IRI’s support for the Syrian regime is “stable and constant” and stressed that there were no restrictions or limits to cooperation with Syria and providing support.

The IRI’s allies also have been key actors in the repression in Syria. The Lebanese Shi’a Islamic fundamentalist movement Hezbollah has notably been instrumental in assisting the Assad regime. Hezbollah has intervened militarily alongside the Syrian regime’s armed forces, while providing technical and logistical support to Damascus and helping some of Syria’s Shi’a population to develop their own self-defence militias. [7] Veteran Hezbollah fighters were also commanding squads of Syrian soldiers, essentially acting as Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO), to the less experienced Syrian regular troops in street fighting in Homs. [8] They also took care of the training of some pro regime militias known as “popular committees” [9] and of some of the new recruits in the army. [10]

Estimates at the end-2013 of Hezbollah fighters in Syria number between 3,000 and 4,000, including elite fighters, experts and reservists, at a time and rotating in and out of the country on thirty days deployments. [11] These numbers might probably remain the same until today.

Iraqi Shi’a fundamentalist groups allied to IRI have also been fighting in Syria in support of Assad.

And contrary to what Tariq Ali said in his TV conference, these actors did not enter Syria following the involvement of foreign interventions from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar but prior to them.

This is not to deny that these regional countries (Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar) have on their side funded various groups, in their far majority Islamic fundamentalist groups that oppose the objectives of the revolution, for their own selfish political interests. Qatar for example have been a key supporter of Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Qaida branch in Syria) and Ahrar Sham, while Turkey have also supported directly or in a passive way various Islamic fundamentalist

groups, such as Jaysh al Fatah coalition led by Jabhat al Nusra and Ahrar Sham and the IS by providing a complete freedom of actions on both sides of borders for a very long period, in northern Syria against democratic FSA forces and especially to oppose any autonomy of Kurdish regions in Syria under the umbrella of the PKK. Private networks of the Gulf Monarchies on their sides have been acting and funding with the approval of their ruling classes various Islamic fundamentalist forces in the perspective of transforming the popular revolution in a sectarian war.

Moreover and more importantly, the **Assad regime** helped as well the development of Daech and other Islamic reactionary forces by first **being guilty of massive crimes, creating millions of refugees, and causing the destruction of Syria**, and secondly by releasing from the prisons of the regime the different individuals who would become the heads of these fundamentalist and reactionary forces. In various amnesty decisions during the start of the revolutionary process, leaders of various Islamic reactionary forces were freed, while democratic activists were imprisoned, tortured, and oppressed. We should realize that the Assad regime targeted and still targets mostly the democratic and progressive activists as well as the Free Syrian Army, while it allowed Daech to grow.

The jihadist presence in Syria was actually increasing in the years prior of the revolution, especially after the US-UK 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. The rise of Islamic fundamentalist actors in Syria was not only the result of support of Gulf monarchies but above all of the regime policies and repression tactics that targeted popular and democratic organisations, trade unions, etc. prior to and during the revolution. In addition, what is less known is that prior to the revolution the regime, since the era of Hafez el Assad, developed and encouraged religious conservative discourses and practices in total contradiction with the picture conveyed by a so-called secular regime.

This has actually been continued with Bachar Al-Assad as he has increased the collaboration with religious associations and conservative segments of the society. Bachar Al Assad promoted, as explained by researcher Lina Khatib, notably the idea of “takrees al-akhlak wa nashr thaqafat al-tasamuh, wa isal al risala al-haqiqiya lil-islam” ( **diffusing morality, spreading the culture of tolerance, and communicating the true message of Islam**) in many of his addresses, interviews and conference presentations. [12] He presented himself and the Syrian regime increasingly as patron of moderate Islam against “Islamic extremism”, and therefore effectively legitimizing the Islamic discourse engulfing the country.

These elements are to say that it is not enough to condemn western imperialism, but also authoritarian regimes in the region, which are an equal source in the growth of Daech by their repressive and economic neo liberal policies. The prisons and the torture chambers of Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the IRI, etc...are also to be condemned completely and no serious defeat of Daech can be imagined without the fall of these regimes and a democratic alternative.

The solution is of course to oppose the jihadist and fundamentalist reactionary forces of Daech but also to oppose the authoritarian regimes, all of them, with their sectarian and authoritarian policies and the reactionary forces that support them. These two actors feed each other and have to be overthrown and defeated if we ever want to hope to build a democratic and progressive popular movement enabling the region to end a nightmare that has lasted too long.

As written on a placard of a revolutionary in Bustan Qasr, Aleppo, in January 2014, “Assad will not be overthrown if ISIS is not overthrown”. Yes, no destruction of Daech and of a similar phenomenon can be expected without the overthrow of the Assad regime.

This is why the following sentence of Tariq Ali is very problematic to say the least **“If you want to fight ISIS, you should be going in and fighting alongside Russia and alongside Assad”**

This dated strategy of choosing a so called “lesser evil” over another, while not tackling the conditions that led to the rise of groups such as Daech, only replicates the same problems over and over again. A solely military solution is in addition definitely not the solution to put an end to Daech or to the conditions that created it.

In 2010, the IS in Iraq was nearly destroyed following the participation of the “Sunni awakening” councils, which fought the IS in Iraq. The refusal of the integration of these groups, the “Sunni awakening” councils, in the Iraqi army and the continued application of the anti-Baathist law established after the U.S. invasion against former leaders close to Saddam Hussein (but mainly used by the Iraqi Prime Minister to suppress all Sunni political forces) together with the repression of popular movements that occurred in various regions of Iraq in the wake of the popular uprisings in the region in 2011 and in 2013 in the Sunni-majority areas (who led a mass campaign of non-violent resistance against Maliki’s government, and particularly its sectarian and authoritarian policies) allowed for the renewed growth of Daech who was then able to mobilise for its own political interests some of the popular frustration among the Iraqi Sunni population.

However, contrary to what was then declared by Daech, the support it enjoyed was far from ‘massive’. If it was massive, why would 500,000 people have left Mosul directly after the takeover of the city in June 2014? In the beginning, it might have been viewed by some in the city as a liberation because the Iraqi army was considered corrupt, sectarian and was oppressing the people of the city. However, as soon as ISIS crushed the rest of the coalition (Baathist and other Islamic fundamentalist groups) with which it occupied the city, it became deeply repressive. This has been the case wherever IS expanded. It has been based not on a popular movement from below, but on a military perspective with harsh repression.

This is why the biggest threat for both Daech and the Iraqi authoritarian and sectarian regime is the massive crowds of protesters in Baghdad and elsewhere in the country we saw this summer and continuing until today challenging both of them with slogans in opposition to the sectarian state, against the division between Sunni and Shi’a populations, for women’s rights and equality, and clear condemnations of sectarian political parties with placards notably saying “the parliament and the Islamic State are two sides of the same coin”, “Daech was born out of your corruption”, etc... [\[13\]](#)

This would be the same in Syria, if we followed Tariq Ali’s logic of allying with the Assad regime to crush Daech. Assad’s regime is the main source and reason of the crimes and massacres in Syria. Large sections of the Syrian revolutionaries have repeatedly say that they want to get rid of Daech, but that this latter is the consequence of a much greater evil: the Assad regime.

The establishment of the IS in Syria was in autumn 2013. Already before that, the UNHCR declared that the number of Syrians forced to flee as refugees in foreign countries had exceeded two millions. Over 97% of Syrian refugees were hosted in countries located in the surrounding area. In addition, some 4.25 million people were displaced within Syria, according to statistics dating from August 27, 2013 published by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Taken together, these figures totalled more than six million displaced people.

The reason that prompted millions of people to flee their homes was the Assad regime that killed, bombarded and repressed large parts of the Syrian population who had risen against its tyranny and barbarism.

But what about after the establishment of the IS in October 2013 in Syria? Was this still the case? Let’s look at the facts for the first six months of 2015. The helicopters of the Assad regime dropped 10.423 barrels bombs on various regions of the country, while the regime forces killed almost 90% of the total civilians dead over the same period, seven times more than the IS. The Islamic State group has executed more than 3500 people in Syria, including nearly 2000 civilians, since declaring its ‘caliphate’ in June 2014, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. [\[14\]](#)

Barbarism has many faces in Syria and that of the Assad regime is the worst. The Assad regime and its allies (Iran, Russia and Hezbollah) are responsible in its vast majority of the more than 250 000 people killed in Syria and of the around 10 million of refugees and IDPs since the uprising began in March 2011.

So while Tariq Ali explains that foreign interventions in the region have led to mass displacement, which is true especially in Iraq, he should also condemn the Assad regime and authoritarian regimes that are also as much responsible for the millions of refugees of the region.

Tariq Ali goes on saying that **“the West created the vacuum in the Middle East: occupation of Iraq, bombing of Libya, while plans to invade Syria and destroy the regime had long been in motion before any activity in Syria according to ex socialist Minister Rolland Dumas”**. He adds that **“American general Wesley Clark describes how he walked in the pentagon during the Afghan war and that a long list of other countries were also on the USA’s list of countries to launch wars against such as Syria Libya, Iran, Somalia, Soudan, and they’ve been waging wars against these countries through various ways”**.

Did plans exist to invade Syria? Maybe, or most probably, yes. Were they implemented? Definitely not. Any kind of serious progressive personality must analyse the Syrian uprising according to the materialist interests that led to this situation. The Syrian uprising is part of the revolutionary processes of the region, which is based on the will for freedom and dignity in the absence of democracy and increasing social inequalities and corruption of the elites. This point, which was mentioned in the rally, is acknowledged in his conference “World Today: Syria Disaster”, but I disagree with him is when he describes about the changing nature of the revolution into a religious one demanding “a Sunni ruler” and “religious system” nearly from the first months of the revolution, this is simply wrong. Democratic slogans and activities remained dominant in the popular movement and is still is in many aspects although much weakened and have indeed less activities, but it still exist. Mass campaigns with democratic aims were still very much present in 2013 and 2014. [\[15\]](#)

Religious fundamentalist movements were above all increasingly present in the militarization of the revolution in armed groups. Jabhat Al Nusra only appeared end of 2011, while Daech appeared in Syria in the autumn 2013, but they were not the one to organise massive demonstrations.

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 chabihias [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 in the Gulf monarchies, to fund specific armed groups to strengthen the support they had or establish relays on the ground.

Regarding the objectives of the USA and Western powers since the beginning of the uprising in Syria, they have never been seriously willing to assist and help the Syrian revolutionaries or 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 and the Gulf regimes, which are not representative of the popular movement and are completely corrupted. In October 2015, even Senator Lindsey Graham challenged Defence 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". [\[16\]](#)

As a reminder, according to the Geneva guidelines of June 30 2012, agreed to unanimously by the Permanent five 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.

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

"Some weapons shipments were so small that commanders had to ration ammunition. One of the U.S.'s favourite 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".

Barack Obama's plan, which was approved by the U.S. Congress, of \$500 million to arm and equip 5,000-10,000 Syrian rebels, was never implemented and 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 sustainment, 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."**

Until today this program is 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 US 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 September 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.

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." This has been a consistent position in Israel since the beginning of the revolution in Syria contrary to what Tariq Ali advanced in his TV conference.

This is without forgetting that prior to and at the beginning of the revolution, Western states were mostly sympathetic to the Assad regime. Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton characterised at the beginning of the uprising in Syria the dictator Bashar Al Assad as a "reformist" 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 reformist". [17] This is without forgetting the invitation to the national palace of the Elysée by French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008.

The Assad regime has actually collaborated with western imperialist governments on many occasions in the past. It was actually Hafez Al-Assad as Minister of Defence who 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 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 and Israel by supporting the fascist groups of the Lebanese Phalange, putting an end to their uprising, and participating in the Palestinian massacre of Tal El Zaatar. It then supported the Fatah al-Intifada's split from Fatah in 1983 and supported the Lebanese Shi'a movement Amal in the War of the Camps between 1985 and 89 against the Palestinians.

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.

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, Bashar Al Assad's cousin, 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.

When Tariq Ali speaks of the tragedy of Palestine, for which he's right, he nevertheless forget the history of repression of the Assad regime against the Palestinian national movement, as mentioned above, and Palestinians within Syria, especially since the beginning of the uprising.

The Assad regime has actually 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... [18]

The Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk has been suffering from a strict siege imposed on it from the summer of 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. [19] There was between 15 000 and 20 000 people in the camp in November 2014, before 2011 Yarmouk had a total population of 250,000 people.

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

**The next statement made by Tariq Ali that needs to be deconstructed is the following:**

**“Think why they are so desperate to come and bomb European cities”**

Firstly, the identity of the two ‘Syrians’ and their active participations in the terrorist attacks in Paris are still to be confirmed. However, even though their participation would be confirmed and they turned out to indeed be Syrians who came from Syria, we should remember that the far majority of terrorists who perpetrated the Paris attacks were French and Belgian nationals, and did not come from far away. So of course imperialist wars attacking and destroying countries with a majority of the population being Muslim is a reason, but so are the political and socio-economic context in which these groups and individual live. In other words, French and Belgian societies, which are characterised by racism, social inequalities, acts of police brutality are an important factor to include in our analysis of these terrorist attacks. [21]

**“The Russians have gone in Syria to fight ISIS, and they are fighting ISIS.”**

This statement is also very problematic, and although the last terrorist attacks of Daech in Paris and elsewhere might change this in a near future, this is simply not true.

A report published by the Center for Documentation of Violations in Syria has shown that civilian casualties rose to 526 civilians after 45 days from the start of Russian air strikes in Syria, that is, to the date of November 15th, 2015, including 137 children and 71 woman. [22] In addition to this, “almost 80 percent of Russia’s declared targets in Syria have been in areas not held by Islamic State”, a Reuters analysis of Russian Defence Ministry data showed on November 21 2015, undermining Moscow’s assertions that its aim is to defeat the group.” [23]

On November 19, 2015, the bread oven in Atareb, a town roughly 25km west of Aleppo city, which served an estimated 120,000 people in and around an opposition-held western Aleppo town has been completely out of commission after a reported Russian airstrike. [24]

On November 28, 2015, Russian airstrikes in central Idlib province destroyed 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. [25] On the next day, a new massacre was committed by the Russian air forces the city of “Ariha” in the countryside of Idlib.. They bombed a popular market and as a result more than 40 civilians died and 70 wounded.

The objectives of these airstrikes are clear: save and consolidate the political and military power of the Assad regime. [26] In other words, crush all forms of opposition—whether democratic or reactionary— to the Assad regime under the so called “war on terror”. Most targets are civilians and factions of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) still existing, in addition to Islamic fundamentalist forces such as Jabhat Al Nusra and Ahrar Sham.

About 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. In areas such as the outskirts of

Aleppo, the bombings in some cases even benefited the IS, thanks to a lightning breakthrough against factions of the FSA disoriented by Russian strikes. Moreover, Russian strikes are operated with the direct collaboration of the US and Israel, which Tariq Ali apparently didn't consider important to condemn.

The Russian intervention in Syria has been and is an imperialist one in order to preserve a regime that is allied to it, which denies Tariq Ali. Accordingly, we should also condemn the massive interventions of the IRI and Hezbollah in Syria alongside the Assad regime to crush the revolution.

**“There are several wars in Syria...but the idea that there are 70,000 non-jihadist in Syria is a lie, it's not true.”**

The Syrian revolutionaries, including Kurdish forces, have been resisting, whether militarily or through peaceful means, against Daech for more than two years in various areas of Syria. [27]

For instance, just recently, in the eastern Deir e-Zor town of al-Bukamal, Daech has faced resistance from the inhabitants, while in the city of Raqqa, a small band of Syrian resistance fighters are carrying out secret guerrilla operations in IS strongholds. [28] The city of Manbij has also witnessed opposition from within against Daech. [29]

The numbers put forward by Charlie Lister in his article [30] seem quite close to the reality and seem rather convincing in my view. It is rather Tariq Ali's job to demonstrate the contrary. [31] This does not mean that we should think that their strength is massive or have any illusions of their capacities to face on their own the Assad regime, Russia, IRI, Hezbollah on one side and Daech and Jabhat Al Nusra on the other, but we should not at the same time deny their presence on the ground as Tariq Ali has done.

But then, the issue of knowing how many exact numbers of revolutionaries in Syria fighting both Assad and Daech is really kind of secondary when in the first place you are not totally in support of the uprising and you have tried to dismiss and delegitimize it for years now.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, Tariq Ali's position regarding the Syrian revolution has been problematic for a while now as he has repeatedly tried to delegitimize the popular revolution in Syria. [32] The Stop the War Movement in the UK has not been different. [33] Moreover, while claiming to crush the roots of Daech, they actually support them by not condemning clearly and completely the Assad authoritarian and criminal regime.

In addition, we have to understand that Russia's military expansion, in addition to Iranian's expansion, is a clear offensive to put a complete end to the popular uprising in Syria by wanting to save and consolidate militarily and politically the Assad regime and to crush all forms of opposition. This is done with the passivity and some acceptance of Western powers, which want to stabilize the region at any price and therefore Assad's resignation is not a pre-condition to a transition period. This situation has been strengthened with the terrorist attacks in Paris and elsewhere as we can see with French government seeking more collaboration with Russia.

The different world imperialist powers and regional bourgeois regimes, in spite of their rivalry, have a common interest in the defeat of the popular revolutions of the region, and the most obvious example is that of Syria. The multiple peace initiatives on Syria, supported by all the global and regional powers without exception, had the same objectives since the beginning of the revolutionary process in 2011: to reach an agreement between the Assad regime and an opportunistic faction – linked to the Western States, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies – of the

opposition coming together in the Syrian Coalition.

The issue is not refusing any kind of solution to an end of the war: the Syrian people have suffered too much and most of them want a form of transitional period towards a democratic Syria, but any kind of “realist solution”, as officials and analysts like to speak, on a mid and long term cannot include Assad and other criminals with blood on their hands of the regime, otherwise we will see a continuation of the military conflict in Syria and the conditions that led to the creations of Daech.

Assad and his various partners in the regime must be held accountable for their crimes, and a similar process could be put in place as well for the crimes of the Islamic fundamentalist forces and other groups as well. In addition to this, we have to understand that to expect any kind of minimum change, not only Assad should be overthrown but the whole team of officials controlling security services, the army and various state apparatus should be dismantled and held accountable. The patrimonial nature of the Syrian regime needs to be included in any understanding for real change.

Any kind of serious movement opposing foreign interventions in Syria cannot only oppose Western interventions, but should as well oppose the interventions of Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and various Iraqi Shi'a fundamentalist groups, which have only caused more deaths and destructions in Syria, in addition of crushing a popular uprising. In the same time, we also oppose the interventions of Gulf monarchies and Turkey in the past, which were for their own self-interests and to change the nature of the revolution into a sectarian war and they supported Islamic fundamentalist groups that attacked, and continue to do so in many regions, revolutionaries, civilians and soldiers from the FSA.

No lesser evil should be chosen, because this is the road to defeat. No to Assad and no to Daech, no to Jabhat Al Nusra. No to the USA and no to Russia. No to Teheran and no to Riyad, no to Doha, no to Istanbul. Yes to the people in struggle for democracy, social justice and equality. This is our political compass.

In my opinion, we must also support the delivery of arms and weapons with no political conditions attached from the West to democratic sections of the FSA and of the Kurdish forces to increase their possibilities for self-determination and fight and struggle against the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces.

But most importantly, any kind of movement claiming to be internationalists should support the pockets of hope that still exist and resist in Syria composed of various democratic and progressive groups and movements opposing all sides of the counter-revolutions, the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist groups. They are the ones still maintaining the dreams of the beginning of the revolution and its objectives: democracy, social justice, equality and no to sectarianism. [\[34\]](#)

When Karl Liebernecht said in 1915 that the main enemy is at home, he also added that this must be done by “cooperating with the proletariat of other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists”. [\[35\]](#) Well in some ways, the cooperation with the popular masses in Syria has not been on the agenda Tariq Ali and Stop the War, neither actually really opposing the policies of their states and others to crush the revolution. In this perspective this section of the left, including Tariq Ali, has not been different in their speeches to various imperialist powers in the world.

The cooperation with the international proletariat means that we must support Syrian revolutionaries against the various international and regional imperialists forces and against the Assad regime, all trying to put an end to a popular revolution for freedom and dignity. And not denying the struggle and sacrifices of the popular masses in Syria and elsewhere.

## Response to Tariq Ali 2015, or the need for internationalist solidarity

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As written on a placard of a revolutionary in Syria in a demonstration in November 27, 2015, “History will remember that the scribbles of the children of Deraa moved the fleets of the world”. We could add against the Syrian revolution.

November 30, 2015

[Syriafreedomforever](#)

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[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ce4...>

[2] <http://tariqaliv.com/portfolio/s2e...>

[3] Regarding the crimes of the US- British occupation and of the Maliki government, I have written extensively about it see for more details: <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpre...>

[4] <http://www.terrorisme.net/p/article...>

[5] <http://www.terrorisme.net/p/article...>

[6] <http://www.understandingwar.org/sit...>

[7] International Crisis Group (ICG) (2014), “Lebanon’s Hizbollah Turns Eastward to Syria”, (pdf.). Available at: [-. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/153-lebanon-s-hizbollah-turns-eastward-to-syria.pdf&gt;>]

[8] <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-...>

[9] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013...>

[10] <http://www.lorientlejour.com/articl...>

[11] <http://www.understandingwar.org/sit...>

[12] Islamic Revival and the promotion of moderate Islam, Lina Khatib, 2012 in State and Islam in Bathist Syria, confrontation or cooptation.

[13] For more information see ; <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpre...>

[14] <http://www.skynews.com.au/news/worl...>

[15] see <http://www.internationalviewpoint.o...>; <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpre...>; <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpre...>. Other examples can be found on [syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com](http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com)

[16] <http://www.c-span.org/video/?c45570...> ]

[17] <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article...>

[18] Buthayina Sha'aban: Palestinians Spread the Chaos in Latakia,” al-Watan News, March 27, 2011 (in Arabic), [“http://www.watnnews.net/NewsDeta...](http://www.watnnews.net/NewsDeta...)

[19] <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/>

[20] <https://en.zamanalwsl.net/news/1222...>

[21] <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/>

[22] <http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en...>

[23] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015...>

[24] <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/>

[25] <http://syriadirect.org/news/50000-p...>

[26] For more info on this issue see <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/>

[27] <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/>

[28] See more at: <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/fe...>

[29] <http://aranews.net/2015/11/syrian-m...>

[30] <http://blogs.new.spectator.co.uk/20...>

[31] Much information can be found on these different groups: –  
• the Army of Revolutionaries (Jaish al-Thuwar), a new Free Syrian Army coalition was established On May 3, 2015, aiming to fight both the Syrian regime and ISIS. Today the Army of Revolutionaries exists as one of the Arab components in the Kurdish YPG-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (For more info see <https://hasanmustafas.wordpress.com...>  
• Southern Front, which includes various factions, in the region of Deraa and elsewhere in the area that oppose Assad and Daech and Jabhat Al Nusra <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/>

[32] see <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/>

[33] <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/>

[34] You can find many examples on my blog Syria Freedom Forever <https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/> of popular resistance.

[35] <https://www.marxists.org/archive/li...>