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Syria

The Syrian revolution is one year old

- IV Online magazine - 2012 - IV446 - March 2012 -

Publication date: Wednesday 21 March 2012

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The Syrian army moved into the district of Amro Baba in Homs on March 1 after having surrounded and bombarded it for a month. The resistance of the population was immediate, all over the country.

The oligarchy in power presented the destruction of Amro Baba as a great victory against "the terrorists". For his part, Colonel Riad Al Assad, who deserted from the Syrian army and took refuge in Turkey, spoke in the name the Free Syrian Army of "a tactical retreat". Both sides were lying.

In reality, there is nothing to be proud of in crushing a population besieged and bombarded for a month, defended by a few hundred lightly armed men. The response of the masses in revolt was immediate: the day after the fall of Homs, there were 619 civilian demonstrations in Syria.

The "commander" exiled in Turkey also lied, because the fall of Homs is a defeat. The retreat was neither tactical nor organized by him. That raises the question of the necessary unification of the groups of deserting soldiers and armed civilians under a single military command subject to a political leadership of the revolutionary coordinating committees on the ground. They should no longer be linked to a virtual commander isolated in Turkey or to the Syrian National Council (SNC) in exile which has gambled to the point of frustration on a hypothetical external military intervention, in the absence of any strategy for change, other than the one that consists of following the requests of its protectors (Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and France). These "protectors" do not all have the same approach. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are exerting pressure to arm the "opposition", that is, the hard and jihadist sectors of the fundamentalist milieu; whereas France, Turkey and the United States consider these milieux dangerous for the stability of the region and the security of the State of Israel, and prefer to weaken Syria, its society and the state, while encouraging an "organized transition", in other words a change within the regime itself.

The dictatorial regime has not, however, collapsed. Political defections from it are almost non-existent and desertion by soldiers remains very limited. Who are the pillars of this regime, apart from its army, its multiple security services and some acolyte parties?

Contestation of the regime is weak in the two big cities of the country, Damascus and Aleppo, where a little under half of the population lives. The dictatorship concentrates its forces of repression there, but this calm is also due to the concentration of the "private-sector" bourgeoisie, which supports the regime. The cases of which we have heard, of financial support from wealthy people (trying to buy a clear conscience) to the revolutionaries remain isolated. The "contract" of this bourgeoisie, which is organically linked to the state and to the dictatorship, was and remains: let us govern and we will let you get rich without limits.

On February 29, a delegation of the government met the representatives of the Aleppo bourgeoisie to respond to its requests for safety and prosperity. Two days later, the dictatorship decided to create a commission on economic policy including the representatives of this bourgeoisie, which moreover takes part in the financing of fascistic pro-regime militias and in the socio-economic organization of the population.

The middle-class has experienced extreme difficulties over the last decade because of implacably applied neoliberal policies. One part of it has taken a position in favour of the revolution, in particular the lower and excluded sectors, and the other has remained undecided or pro-regime, either because, for the majority of them, their employer is the state itself, or because of their fears of uncertainty or change.

Since 1970, the Assad dictatorship has encouraged Islamic and Christian religious institutions to allow the

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development of currents that are apolitical if not loyal to the regime and actively hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood. Between 1970 and 2000, approximately 12,000 mosques were built by official religious institutions, and 1 400 Assad Institutes for the study of the Koran were inaugurated.

The Islamic religious hierarchy (Sunni, Shiite and Druze) has taken a position in support of the regime.

The Churches (Eastern, Western and Anglican) have made a Joint Declaration in favour of the regime. The Maronite Patriarch Alra'ai has affirmed his support on several occasions. The same goes for the Shiite and Druze hierarchies. That has not prevented lower-level religious functionaries from joining the revolt, but it does not wipe out the negative and counter-revolutionary role of their hierarchies.

The popular revolt is confronting the counter-revolution (the dictatorship, its domestic and foreign allies and the reactionary Arab countries and their allies) and it must respond to the question of increasing armed resistance, by integrating it into the revolutionary strategy of the masses.

The organization of the masses from below must articulate the two levels. These formations from below will have to be democratically elected and to assume at the same time a role of organization of non-violent struggles, of self-defence and of organizing the daily life of the masses in revolt. In other words, it is necessary to help create the conditions for the formation of a counter-power. All the forces of the Syrian revolutionary left are called upon to engage in this task.