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Palestine/Syria

# On The Allies We're Not Proud Of: A Palestinian Response to Troubling Discourse on Syria

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**We, the undersigned Palestinians, write to affirm our commitment to the amplification of Syrian voices as they endure slaughter and displacement at the hands of Bashar Al-Assad's regime. We are motivated by our deep belief that oppression, in all of its manifestations, should be the primary concern of anyone committed to our collective liberation. Our vision of liberation includes the emancipation of all oppressed peoples, regardless of whether or not their struggles fit neatly into outdated geopolitical frameworks.**

We are concerned by some of the discourse that has emerged from progressive circles with regards to the ongoing crisis in Syria. In particular, we are embarrassed by the ways in which some individuals known for their work on Palestine have failed to account for some crucial context in their analysis of Syria.

The Syrian revolution was in fact a natural response to 40 years of authoritarian rule. The Assad regime, with the support of its foreign financial and military backers, is attempting to preserve its power at the expense of the millions of Syrians whom the regime has exiled, imprisoned, and massacred. We believe that minimizing this context in any discussion of Syria dismisses the value of Syrian self-determination and undermines the legitimacy of their uprising.

We also believe that an important consequence of all foreign interventions, including those purportedly done on behalf of the uprising, has been the setback of the original demands of revolution. The revolution is a victim, not a product, of these interventions. It is imperative for any analysis of Syria to recognize this fundamental premise. We cannot erase the agency of Syrians struggling for liberation, no matter how many players are actively working against them.

Though we maintain that the phenomenon of foreign aid demands thorough critique, we are concerned by the ways in which foreign aid has been weaponized to cast suspicion on Syrian humanitarian efforts. Foreign aid is not unique to Syria; it is prevalent in Palestine as well. We reject the notion that just because an organization is receiving foreign aid, it must follow then that that organization is partaking in some shadowy Western-backed conspiracy. Such nonsense has the effect of both undermining humanitarian efforts while simultaneously whitewashing the very crimes against humanity that necessitated the aid in the first place.

Furthermore, we object to the casual adoption of "war on terror" language. Enemies of liberation have historically used this rhetoric to target humanitarians, organizers, and community members. From Muhammad Salah to the Midwest 23 to the Holy Land Five, our community is all too familiar with the very real consequence of employing a "war on terror" framework. Therefore, we reject a discourse that perpetuates these old tactics and peddles harmful and unwarranted suspicion against Syrians.

Along these lines, it is our position that any discussion of Syria that neglects the central role of Bashar Al-Assad and his regime in the destruction of Syria directly contradicts the principles of solidarity by which we abide. We have reflected on our own tendency to heroize those who advocate on behalf of the Palestinian struggle, and we fear that some members of our community may have prioritized the celebrity status of these individuals over the respect and support we owe to those Syrians affected most directly by the war, as well as those living in the diaspora whose voices have been dismissed as they have watched their homeland be destroyed.

We will no longer entertain individuals who fail to acknowledge the immediate concerns of besieged Syrians in their analysis. Despite reaching out to some of these individuals, they have shown an unwillingness to reflect on the impact of their analysis. We regret that we have no choice left but to cease working with these activists whom we

once respected.

We would like to encourage others who are guided by similar principles to do the same.

13 October 2016

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