Challenging Intellectuals Who Justify Iranian Imperialism

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Below we print a summary of a longer article by two Iranian socialists who are opposed to Iran's military intervention in Syria. Their article is followed by a response from Frieda Afary and Joseph Daher.

National Security Thugs: Facilitators of Turning the Nation and State into Nationalist Bedfellows

By Omid Ranjbar and Azadeh Shurmand

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The discourse of "national security" is being used to brainwash the Iranian public and prevent them from opposing the regime's destructive role in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Bahrain. In this effort, the regime is being aided by the "democratic nationalist" reformist intellectuals. "National security" is being turned into an abstraction that has nothing to do with the welfare of the people in Iran or the region.

Iran's intervention in Syria is motivated by political, ideological and economic reasons. It needs Syria as a regional ally and as a route to the Hezbollah in Lebanon. It also counts on lucrative reconstruction contracts and real estate deals in Syria. The Iranian regime is also expanding its role in Iraq. In doing so, it has even alienated much of the Arab Shia population of Iraq who think they are being used in Iran's competition with Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Iranian intellectuals need to openly declare where they stand on the issue of Iran's intervention in Syria and its decisive role in the war. They need to ask: Why is Iran defending the Assad regime? Has the "conservative reformist" Rouhani been able to create any changes in this regard? Instead, reformist nationalists have committed the crime of embracing the false belief that Iran is a powerful force in weakening ISIS.

Iranian intellectuals need to expose the way in which the Iranian regime is using Syria as a key element in building a new order in the region. This imperialism will lead to the further

entrenchment of the regime of the Islamic Republic inside Iran, the further militarization of society and the further repression of internal dissidents.

The only solution is the regional solidarity of socialist/secular forces. An example of this is the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists. The Rojava struggle in northern Syria which emphasizes direct democracy, the peaceful coexistence of national and religious minorities, ecological concerns, equality of women and men on all levels, and grassroots leadership, is a model reminiscent of the Paris Commune of 1871 that needs to be strengthened and defended. Rojava's opposition to ISIS and the states that support ISIS has been heroic. International brigades like those which went to Spain in solidarity with the 1936 Spanish Revolution are needed in Rojava today.

If the existing opposition in Iran brings different groups together for the purpose of creating solidarity with progressive movements in the region, including Rojava and the popular democratic movement of the people of Syria, this solidarity will lead to strengthening democratic and progressive opposition forces inside Iran. Seeing the link between imperialist policies abroad and oppressive policies at home is crucial.

Response from Frieda Afary and Joseph Daher

September 7, 2016

We welcome this brave statement and its challenge to those Iranian reformist or leftist intellectuals who support Iran's military intervention in Syria and its imperialist motivations in the region. The authors not only expose the lies of the Islamic Republic and its intellectual supporters but also call for a principled alliance of socialist and progressive forces in the region around the issues of social justice, secular democracy and an alternative to capitalism.

We agree that the Kurdish struggle for self-determination in Syria and elsewhere in the region is a test of all who call themselves socialists. Especially, at this moment when all the global and regional powers are backing Turkey's military intervention in northern Syria which is aimed at attacking and silencing the Kurds, defending the struggle for Kurdish self-determination becomes crucial.

Unfortunately, for various reasons, the collaboration of Arabs and Kurds in the beginning of the Syrian revolution in 2011 was later weakened considerably, while racism and sectarianism increased. **First**, Syrian liberal and Islamic opposition leaders and groups opposed any type of Kurdish self-determination, and on some occasions supported attacks by Islamic fundamentalist groups against the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and Kurdish civilians. In doing so, they expressed a chauvinist position that must be condemned. **Secondly**, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party chose a pragmatic non-aggression agreement with the Assad regime in the Summer of 2012, instead of directly addressing and joining the revolutionary masses who were still actively fighting to overthrow the Assad regime. In addition, in the Fall of 2015, the PYD supported Russian imperialism's massive airstrikes which were aimed mostly at Syrian Arab democratic opposition forces and civilians, and only in a minor way against ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusra. Those air strikes destroyed the much needed civilian institutions in the areas that were not under the control of the Assad regime or ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra.

The three cantons of Rojava administered by the PYD have provided a form of autonomy that includes women's rights, minority participation and secular institutions. Nevertheless, some contradictions and problems exist that do not represent grassroots self-organization but rather processes controlled from above. We must address the authoritarian practices of the PYD both in their internal organization and functioning and in their attitude and practices toward dissenting views and organizations. (For further details please see Joseph Daher's articles and interviews with

Kurdish activists on the website of the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists.)

This does not change the fact that all socialists need to uphold a principled position of support for Kurdish self-determination in Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran.

Now the Turkish army is using various armed Syrian Arab opposition forces including Salafists, other Islamic fundamentalist groups and various smaller sections of the Free Syrian Army to attack PYD forces, to bomb and kill Kurdish civilians and to build a barrier wall on the border to separate Syrian and Turkish Kurds.

We oppose Turkey's military intervention in Syria just as we oppose the military intervention of Russia, Iran, the Gulf monarchies, and Western forces. They do not support the interests of the popular classes and only increase sectarian and ethnic divisions. They all wish to maintain the Assad regime (with or without Assad), reject Kurdish self-determination, and will thus continue the war.

In conclusion, we agree with our Iranian comrades about the need for an alliance between Kurdish, Arab, Iranian and Turkish revolutionaries who oppose the Assad regime, defend Kurdish self-determination, oppose all religious fundamentalists, authoritarian regimes and imperialist alliances. That is why the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists is reaching out to Middle Eastern socialists who are searching for a humanist alternative to capitalism, its sectarianism, gender discrimination, racism and chauvinism.

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