

Rage for Aleppo and Syria

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They say that generals usually prepare for the last war. This has happened to the peace movement, too. The anti-war coalitions in the U.S. and UK are acting as if this was 2003 and everyone need to focus on Western imperial adventures. Instead circumstances are quite different. The main carnage right now has little to do with “the Empire”. A dictator from a family dynasty is using his entire military, every weapon the country owns, to bring a nation to heel. He’s assisted (and in some ways commanded) by foreign powers, one semi-fascist, the other a theocracy. The larger anti-war organizations and coalitions have nothing to say or bleat “Our main responsibility is to criticize our own government’s abuses” or airily call for all foreign forces to stop intervening. (There are also the unspeakable organizations licking the dictator’s boot in the name of “anti-imperialism”.)

Half a million people have died because the Assad gang is determined to hold on no matter what. The Russians are blowing up whole blocks in Aleppo, systematically destroying medical facilities and White Helmet rescue facilities. Assad has hundreds of thousands of people under siege. Palestinians refugees from camps like Yarmouk are exiled once again. The “world community” has fed refugees, but is paralyzed about action within Syria. The UN airdrops food to only one city, the Assad-run Deir al-Zour surrounded by ISIS. Worse, they’ve been sending aid money right into the pockets of members of the regime.

It has the feel of the late ‘30s, Spain to be exact. In 1938 the Spanish democratic forces were being drowned in blood by the internal and foreign fascists. That by and large is the situation in Syria today (that in Syria the fascists are the “government” and the rebels the progressive forces is immaterial). Yes, the rebels are not pure. After years of neglect religious based armed groups predominate. Some ally with some very nasty Islamic supremacist groups. Before anyone points fingers remember that in Spain in 1936-8 the democratic and revolutionary forces were allied with and armed by the Soviet Union. That land was led by a dictator who had just killed millions in Ukraine and purged immense numbers of Soviet communists. He was a monster, but few today say the Spanish republic should have spurned that alliance.

No-fly Zone?

Syrians have called for a no-fly zone for years. In October 2011 the BBC reported 170 demonstrations calling for a no-fly zone in a single day. The Left was dubious. The history of those zones was not encouraging. In Iraq a no-fly zone was established in 1991 over the north of the country, supposedly to protect the Iraqi Kurds. It did stop Saddam Hussein from ravaging them (and Shia in the south), but it was seen as a step in the full scale “Shock and Awe” invasion and occupying of Iraq by the West. In Libya in 2011 France, Italy, Britain and the U.S. set up a non-fly zone supposedly to protect the civilian population from threats of immense violence from Omar Gaddafi.

They got UN support for it but used it as an excuse to assist rebels to oust and kill Gaddafi. Today Libya looks like a mess. On the other hand in the light of what happened in Syria those who warned that Gaddafi very well could have committed a bloodbath seem on solid ground. Clay Claiborne recently wrote a piece about Libya and pointed to a 2012 Gallop poll of Libyans which he says shows that Libyans “overwhelmingly” supported NATO airstrikes.

I heard Jill Stein speak in New Britain, CT last week to mostly students at a local college. She said virtually nothing about foreign policy, but she did take time out to bash Hillary Clinton for comments she’s made supposedly supporting a no-fly zone. Stein said it was risking war with a nuclear armed power. And that was all she has to say about Syria. If she had an alternative or even expressed horror about what Assad/Russia/Iran were doing I could respect what she was saying. But what I heard really deflated respect I had for her (and I’ve written in support of her candidacy even with neo-fascist Trump making his run).

You may be surprised but there actually is a no-fly zone in Syria. It’s one small area where Assad troops attacked the Kurdish YPD force that’s getting U.S. military aid. After it happened the U.S. sent up jets and buzzed Assad planes and said in no uncertain terms that no air force was to touch the YPD. And that was that. There was no repetition. A portion of northeast Syria was made a no-fly zone and World War III did not break out.

I’m not saying that the peace movement should call for a no-fly zone, but I respect desperate Syrians who do and am repulsed by the “anti-imperialist” left who demonize as an “agent of the Pentagon” anyone who demand a NFZ.

Ideas for Action

A number of us on the RPM network have come up with a letter with a few ideas. Basically it amounts to 1) denouncing the Lavrov-Kerry plan for a temporary ceasefire and then joint expansion of the bombing to anti-Assad forces; 2) demanding airdrops of food and supplies to break every siege in Syria, and; 3) open denunciation of Russian and Iranian participation and support for Assad war crimes.

As Russia proceeds to use bunker busters inside of Aleppo and have produced scenes of unparalleled horror, activists have called for days of protest this weekend, especially on Saturday, October 1 for a “Global Day of Rage for Aleppo”.

Other ideas: Urge the media to interview some of the 150 Syrian secular intellectuals featured in a *Nation* article this week. Urge them to talk about the Right Livelihood Award (co-)Winner of 2016, the White Helmets. Have them investigate why the World Food Program can airdrop food to Deir al-Zour and nowhere else.

In 1943 hundreds of rabbis marched from the Lincoln Memorial in DC to demand action against what we now call the Holocaust. Couldn’t a large of groups of imams and other clergy lead something similar?

Put pressure on the candidates for president. Only Hillary Clinton expresses any sentiments about doing something to protect Syrian civilians (though she didn’t do much as Secretary of State). She talked about a no-fly zone before the Democratic Convention, but neither Clinton or Trump have talked about Syria since August. A number of Syrians are campaigning for Hillary, but if she wins she doesn’t even take office until January. By then Aleppo may go the way of Darayya, or worse. Why not a major demonstration in front of one of the remaining debates with a messages, #DropFoodNotBombs #BreaktheSieges #SaveAleppo?

Stanley Heller is a longtime activist and writer on the Middle East and is webmaster for www.rpm.world.