

New York Times gives glimpse of sectarian bloodbath being prepared by Syria intervention

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An article published last week in the *New York Times* on the spillover of sectarian tensions from Syria into Turkey belies the “democratic” and “humanitarian” pretexts for the ever more violent drive for regime-change by the US and its allies.

Times correspondent Jeffrey Gettleman reports from Antakya, the capital of Turkey’s southern province of Hatay, which borders on Syria and the Mediterranean. He begins by describing a lynch-mob assault on the home of the Evli family, whom he describes as “Alawite, a historically persecuted minority sect of Islam, and also the sect of Syria’s embattled leaders.”

“The mob began to hurl insults. Then rocks,” he writes. “‘Death to Alawites!’” they shouted. ‘We’re going to burn you all down!’”

“Then someone fired a gun,” he continues. “‘They were there to kill us,’ said Servet Evli, who was hiding in his bedroom with his pregnant wife and terrified daughter, both so afraid they urinated through their clothes.” The mob was dispersed only after police arrived and announced—to the dismay of the Evlis—that the family would be moving out of the neighborhood.

A number of analysts familiar with the complex ethnic and religious mix in Turkey and Syria have criticized Gettleman for conflating Syria’s Alawites and Turkey’s Alevis, two sects that have different historical origins and beliefs, and both of which have only tenuous ties to Shiite Islam. However, this confusion apparently exists on both sides of the religious divide within Turkey. As Gettleman reports, the Sunni majority has been whipped up against the Alevi minority by both the civil war across the border and the policies of the Islamist Sunni government in Ankara; and large sections of the minority identifies

with and supports the regime of Bashar al-Assad across the border.

Turkey is by no means the only country in the region to see the bloodletting in Syria spill across its borders. Lebanon is threatened with being swamped with both refugees and political fallout from the Syrian conflict, with the danger that the fighting across the border will re-ignite the sectarian tensions that previously erupted in civil war.

In Iraq, the US-backed campaign by the so-called “Free Syrian Army”—a collection of gangs and militias in which Sunni Islamist elements play a predominant role—has re-animated Islamic State of Iraq, the Al Qaeda linked militia opposed to the Shiite-led government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. The death toll from bombings and other terrorist attacks rose to 325 in July, the bloodiest month in two years. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Iraqi Shiites who sought refuge in Syria during the carnage under US occupation are being forced back across the border by the ruthless sectarian violence unleashed by the Western-backed Sunni militias.

Gettleman’s article in the *Times* is unusually frank about the character of this violence. The Syrian conflict, he writes, increasingly “degenerates into a bloody sectarian showdown,” while there has been a “surge of foreign jihadists streaming into Turkey, en route to fight a holy war on Syrian battlefields.” He adds, “Many jihadists are fixated on turning Syria, which under the Assad family’s rule has been one of the most secular countries in the Middle East, into a pure Islamist state.”

Citing fears of persecution within the Alevi minority population in Hatay, as well as its support for Assad,

Gettleman writes: “Part of this sentiment may be self-protective. The Syrian rebels hardly conceal a vicious sectarian antipathy. Khaldoun al-Rajab, an officer with the Free Syrian Army, said he witnessed two Alawites in a car take a wrong turn in Homs and end up in a Sunni neighborhood. ‘Of course they were arrested and killed by the rebels,’ he said.”

These are the forces that the CIA, working together with the Turkish, Saudi and Qatari regimes, is arming, “advising” and training to carry out mayhem inside Syria.

What this article reveals—particularly given its appearance in the pages of the *New York Times*—is extraordinary. The *Times* has served as an enthusiastic conduit for the propaganda campaign waged by the US and its allies in support of regime-change in Syria. It has routinely written about Syria’s Alawite population as if it were synonymous with the Assad regime and deserved to be attacked.

In shifting the lens to Turkey, the Gettleman article blows up all of the pretexts provided by Washington for its intervention in Syria. This intervention is not about “democracy” or “human rights”. Rather, it is about the deliberate provocation—in league with Al Qaeda elements—of a dirty sectarian war aimed at reordering the Middle East in the interests of US imperialism and its principal regional ally, Israel.

Washington’s geo-political aims in the region are clear: to establish US military hegemony over the region’s vast energy reserves as well as the means of delivering them to the major powers, including its principal economic rivals in Europe and Asia. The Syrian intervention follows the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the US-NATO war for regime-change in Libya, all waged for similar ends.

Nor are the criminal methods used to these ends in Syria all that new. A similar operation was mounted by the CIA in Afghanistan in the early 1980s, working with much the same forces: Saudi Arabia and reactionary Islamic fundamentalist forces, including Osama bin Laden and the others who established Al Qaeda. Earlier, Washington had relied on Muslim fundamentalist groups as shock troops in carrying out the mass slaughter of members and supporters of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in the aftermath of the right-wing CIA-backed coup that toppled President Sukarno in 1965.

What distinguishes the intervention in Syria is Washington’s use of the sectarian carnage it has whipped up there as a proxy war aimed at destroying Iranian influence throughout the region and setting the stage for a war against Iran itself. These far-ranging objectives drive the growing threat of sectarian bloodshed spreading across the Middle East.

The other new political feature of the Syrian intervention is the ability of American and European imperialism to rally behind their objectives an international coterie of pseudo-left organizations that have swallowed whole the lying pretexts about “democracy” and “human rights.” They have in many cases made their own unique contribution, portraying the Islamic fundamentalist and pro-Western forces armed and backed by Washington, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey as “revolutionary.”

This is the case with groups ranging from the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US to the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain. These organizations, despite their names, have nothing to do with socialism or opposition to capitalism. Their lining up with the dirty regime-change operation in Syria has exposed them as merely left-talking political assets of imperialism.



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