

Pseudo-lefts back Washington hardliners on Syria and Russia

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In the midst of the increasingly evident divisions within the US state apparatus over what policy to pursue in relation to Syria and the recent Russian bombing campaign, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) has weighed in, lending ideological support to the most bellicose imperialist factions.

For years, the ISO has promoted the bloody sectarian civil war in Syria as the “Syrian Revolution.” It has blatantly misrepresented the character of Syria’s Islamist “rebels,” portraying these right-wing mercenaries as “revolutionaries.” It has steadfastly defended their “right” to receive arms and funding from the CIA and Washington’s reactionary regional allies, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar, and even to support direct US military intervention.

In 2013, the ISO placed itself at the center of an international campaign to drum up support for the imperialist-orchestrated conspiracy to oust the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, appealing in the name of “human rights” to the milieu of pseudo-lefts and liberals to support the anti-Assad “revolution.”

It grotesquely sought to equate the events in Syria with the revolutionary struggles that had erupted earlier in Egypt and Tunisia, deliberately concealing the glaring differences between the class forces involved as well as in the attitude of the US and the other imperialist powers to these disparate struggles.

The intervention in Syria, like the one before it in Libya, was Washington’s response to the earlier revolutionary events—an attempt to impose puppet regimes in line with the drive to establish US hegemony over the entire oil-rich region, the same agenda that underlay the US war in Iraq.

In lending their support to these operations, elements such as the ISO, the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany and similar pseudo-left organizations around the world placed themselves firmly in the camp of imperialism. These organizations speak on behalf of privileged sections of the upper-middle class. The only thing “left” about them is their willingness to provide phony “left” justifications to create a broader constituency for imperialist war and aggression. They function quite consciously as mouthpieces of imperialist intelligence agencies.

In the more recent period, the ISO had fallen largely silent as the real nature of the Syrian “revolutionaries,” consisting of right-wing Sunni sectarian militias backed by the Saudis and linked to Al Qaeda, became undeniable.

The bloody carnage carried out by these forces clearly bore no resemblance to the “people’s revolution” for “freedom and dignity” touted by the ISO, and the organization apparently concluded that the less said, the better. Before Russia launched its bombing campaign last month, the ISO’s web site had published just three articles on Syria since the beginning of the year.

With Russia’s air strikes in support of the Assad government, however, the ISO has swung back into action, seeking to portray the escalating crisis in Syria as a clash between rival “imperialisms,” Washington and

Moscow, in which its sympathies clearly rest with the former.

The first major analysis piece published by the ISO on the Russian intervention was an interview with Gilbert Achcar, a professor of international relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London and the chief Middle East analyst for the Pabloite United Secretariat.

Achcar, like the ISO, was a leading propagandist for the “Syrian Revolution,” and before that a vociferous supporter of the US-NATO war for regime change in Libya. During the Libyan intervention, Achcar insisted that “anti-imperialist principles” had to be cast aside on “humanitarian” grounds. He parroted the imperialist pretext for the war, insisting that a massacre in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi was imminent and could be stopped only by a US-NATO bombing campaign.

It was widely acknowledged after the intervention that the threat of a massacre existed only in Washington’s propaganda campaign, which promoted a war that claimed the lives of over 30,000 Libyans and left the country in a state of chaos and devastation that continues to this day.

By no means chastened by the Libyan experience, Achcar set about trying to reproduce it in Syria, going so far as to meet with the collection of US and French intelligence assets that comprised the Syrian National Council, counseling them on the most effective way to lobby for Western military intervention.

The interview published by the ISO, entitled “What Russia wants in Syria,” was conducted by the web site *LeftEast*. The source is not insignificant. *LeftEast* has acknowledged receiving funding from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Social Democratic Party-linked think tank that constitutes one of the main vehicles of German imperialism to promote its international interests. The foundation was highly active in preparing last year’s coup in Ukraine, as it was in previous “color revolutions” in the former Soviet Union.

If such ties fail to give pause to the ISO, it is for good reason. The US organization is itself on the receiving end of funding from similar foundations.

Achcar begins his interview by admonishing “simplistic critics of the US,” arguing that “the Obama administration is not at all in the business of ‘regime change’ in Syria.” Instead, he states, “They just wanted the Assad regime without Assad himself.”

In other words, US imperialism is not seeking the destruction of the entire state apparatus in Syria, merely its decapitation. But why bother ousting Assad at all? Here Achcar is silent, concealing the fact that what Washington wants is to install its own puppet at the head of the Syrian state in order to tighten its grip over the Middle East and deprive its regional and global adversaries, Russia, China and Iran, of a strategic ally.

Concealing US imperialist aims is crucial to Achcar’s central argument, which sets out to portray Russia as the principal “imperialist” aggressor in Syria. “Putin’s macho bullying contrasts a lot with the Obama administration’s timid attitude in the Middle East over recent years,” he declares.

Who does Achcar think he's kidding? The "timid" Obama administration has sent ten times more troops into Iraq than Russia has to Syria. It has carried out drone assassinations and massacres throughout the region. It has shipped arms and advisors to fuel the brutal Saudi-led war in Yemen, while providing similar backing to Israel's war last year against Gaza. It is by far the main arms supplier to the region, sending tens of billions of dollars in weaponry to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Egypt and other countries in the last year alone.

Yet Achcar insists that Russia's airstrikes in Syria represent a "major breakthrough for Russian imperialism in its competition with US imperialism."

This is rubbish. Russia's intervention in Syria is reactionary, carried out in the interests of the oligarchy that enriched itself through the Stalinist bureaucracy's liquidation of the Soviet Union and the looting of state property and immiseration of the working class. From Moscow's standpoint, however, its military actions in Syria are largely of a defensive nature, aimed at preventing Washington from depriving Russia of its only Arab ally in the region and its sole overseas military base, the naval station at Tartus, and furthering the drive by the West to encircle and ultimately dismember the Russian Federation.

One has only to compare this single Russian base in Syria to the more than 700 US bases scattered across 63 countries and Washington's deployment of over a quarter of a million troops overseas. The notion of a US-Russian "inter-imperialist competition" advanced by Achcar—and the ISO—is false to the core. The gross national income of the US is 39 times that of Russia. The Russian economy remains largely dependent on oil and gas, which account for 68 percent of the country's export earnings, making its relation to the world market more like that of Iran than the relation to the world market of the US and the other imperialist powers.

Achcar and the ISO ignore such facts. Nor do they concern themselves with the fact that the contemporary Russian capitalist state is the outcome of a vastly different historical development—the Stalinist dissolution of a state that originated in the 1917 socialist revolution—than that of the US and the other imperialist powers.

Achcar attributes the rise of "Russian imperialism" in the Middle East to the insufficiently aggressive US intervention in Syria. The demise of the "mainstream Syrian opposition," he states, is due to "the lack of support from Washington and especially the US veto on its supply with anti-aircraft defensive means." This, he claims, is what led to the rise of "jihadist" forces.

If Washington stopped short of shipping surface-to-air missiles to the "mainstream opposition"—while supplying hundreds of tons of arms and ammunition via Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar—it was because from the outset this "mainstream" was dominated by Al Qaeda-linked forces that could ultimately turn such anti-aircraft systems against the US itself.

Lamenting the failure of the US to sufficiently escalate its proxy war in Syria, Achcar states, "Those who advocated support to the mainstream opposition, like [Hillary] Clinton and then-CIA Director David Petraeus, now believe that the events proved them right, that the catastrophic development of the situation in Syria is, to a large extent, a result of Obama's wrong policy."

What does Achcar believe? He doesn't say. Nor for that matter does the ISO. One can only conclude that they are in agreement with Clinton and Petraeus, who are now advocating a "no-fly zone" in Syria, a measure that could trigger armed conflict between the US and Russia, creating the conditions for a nuclear war.

In making the case for a more direct imperialist intervention, Achcar ridicules Moscow's insistence that its intervention is legal, as it is acting at the request of the "legitimate" government of Syria. Achcar declares that Moscow's is "a very limited conception of legitimacy."

"You could say, of course, that Assad represents the legitimate government from the point of view of international law, but certainly not

from the point of view of democratic legitimacy," he states. "It may be the 'legal' government by UN standard, but it is definitely not 'legitimate' as it was never elected democratically. This is a regime that is the product of a coup d'état that took place 45 years ago. It is still in power after a transmission of the presidency by inheritance within the quasi-royal dynasty that rules the country by means of security services and military dictatorship."

This "legal...UN standard" that Achcar dismisses is written into the UN Charter. It bars "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state," and affirms that there is no right "to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state."

These essential tenets of international law have never been accepted by US imperialism, which has intervened in country after country throughout the last century, invading their territories and overthrowing their governments. Achcar provides a pseudo-legal rationalization for such crimes.

As for his broader definition of "legitimacy," one could clearly argue that the vast majority of governments in the Middle East are illegitimate. Curiously, this appears to be a concern for him only in the case of those regimes targeted by imperialism, such as Libya and Syria, not for those fighting alongside it, like the Saudi and Qatari oil monarchies.

The prevalence of such regimes in the Middle East is a function of the organic inability of the national bourgeoisie to carry out a revolutionary settling of accounts with imperialism and develop genuinely democratic societies. Basing themselves on the borders, state structures and sectarian divisions inherited from colonialism, they can defend their rule only by dictatorial means.

The resolution of this historic problem through the overthrow of these regimes can be accomplished only by the working class by means of the socialist revolution. It cannot be entrusted to the imperialist powers and their proxies.

As for the "Syrian Revolution," Achcar no longer speaks in such grandiose terms to describe a filthy imperialist intervention. Now he insists only that the imperialist powers "get rid of Assad," declaring that "The rosier dream of Syria's ordinary people for now is the end of the war, with a deployment of UN forces to maintain order and rebuild the state and the country." In other words, back to colonialism.



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