

Syria and the pro-imperialist pseudo-left

Alex Lantier
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This week, as criticism of the US-Russian cease-fire in Syria mounted within the Pentagon brass, a prominent foreign policy analyst issued a statement denouncing the truce. He reiterated US calls for the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad, and he advocated a major escalation of the US-NATO intervention in Syria—arming the Islamist opposition with anti-aircraft missiles and other weapons.

“As almost everybody can now tell,” this critic wrote, “the new cease-fire agreement on Syria is doomed to break down, as would any such agreement that does not settle the core political problem of the crisis. Of course, even a respite that doesn’t last is better than nothing at all (although the truce has so far been very disappointing with regard to humanitarian relief). But short of an agenda that includes a comprehensive agreement for Bashar al-Assad to step down and allow a transition toward a pluralist government, no cease-fire stands a chance in that war-torn country.”

He added, “Without a balance of military forces on the ground in Syria which would compel the Assad regime and its Iranian backers to seek real compromise, a genuine political settlement is not possible. ... [T]he issue of creating such a balance of forces—especially by providing the Syrian opposition with anti-aircraft missiles capable of limiting the Syrian regime’s use of air power, its main weapon of large-scale destruction—has been the principal bone of contention on Syria within the Obama administration since 2012.”

One might assume that this essay had been prepared by a CIA operative, or, perhaps, a columnist for either the *Wall Street Journal* or the *New York Times*. In fact, the author is Gilbert Achcar, the prominent associate of France’s New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). Achcar left that movement to take a professorship at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London and join the NPA-linked Socialist Resistance group in Britain. His latest article was written for the *Nation* and republished on the Pabloite’s *International Viewpoint* web site, affiliated with the NPA.

As Achcar was drafting his essay, Ashley Smith of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the United States published a similar warmongering appeal on the *Socialist Worker* web site. For Smith, the truce should be used to re-arm US-backed “revolutionary” militias fighting alongside the Al Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front. He wrote that the truce “at best, might allow breathing space for revolutionaries to regroup for a future uprising against the regime.”

Smith attacked the Obama administration for lacking the appetite for a major confrontation with Russia. Smith criticizes Obama for having failed to militarily exploit the concocted “poison gas” episode of 2013 to overthrow Assad and bring the opposition to power.

This was because Obama, Smith wrote, has been “hesitant to press this policy out of fear of getting dragged into another ground war in the Middle East.” He continued: “Thus, whenever the Assad regime crossed supposed ‘red lines,’ like its continuing use of chemical weapons, the US preferred to cut deals with Russia rather than take any action that might topple Assad, but also threaten a wider upheaval. The US has also refused to supply the FSA [Free Syrian Army militia] with weapons it pleaded for to defend itself against regime air strikes.”

Smith’s denunciations of the Assad regime’s “relentless bombing of civilian targets” are utterly hypocritical and tailored to the specific needs of American imperialism. His selective outrage overlooks the US-backed Saudi bombing and blockade in Yemen, which has killed thousands and threatens hundreds of thousands of children with starvation. Smith has written nothing on Yemen, which has been ignored by *Socialist Worker* and the entire pseudo-left press.

Nor is Smith concerned about the sectarian massacres carried out by the US-backed Islamist opposition in Syria, and the bloody record of US imperialism itself, whose wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria have still claimed a far greater toll than the Kremlin’s Syrian intervention.

The writings of Achcar and Smith obliterate any

significant distinction between the positions of leading pseudo-left political tendencies and the most ruthless representatives of American and European imperialism. Indeed, in an extraordinary passage, Achcar closes his essay with a friendly quotation from Anthony Cordesman, the head of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) think tank.

“If anyone in the region had any illusion about the democratic and humanitarian pretexts invoked by Washington in previous wars, they have lost them completely by now,” he writes. “As Anthony Cordesman, one of the most astute observers of the military-political situation in the Middle East, recently observed, the US president is now entirely focused on an ‘exit strategy’—not an exit from the Syrian crisis, though, but his own exit from office.”

Achcar’s “astute observer” is in fact one of American militarism’s most important strategists. He is the author of innumerable reports calling for the escalation of US wars in the Middle East and aggression against China and Russia. He is also the author of a CSIS report on nuclear war that dismissed the destruction of India and Pakistan—that is, the slaughter of hundreds of millions of people—as economically unimportant. “The loss of India and Pakistan might create some short term economic issues for importers of goods and services,” he wrote. “However, the net effect would shift benefits to other suppliers without any clear problems in substitutions or costs.”

From Achcar’s standpoint, however, Cordesman is a colleague with whom he can work on the friendliest basis. They share the same objectives, as well as the same enemies—that is, anyone who opposes their war policies.

The articles by Achcar and Smith express not just the positions of these two individuals, but the evolution of social forces and their reflection in political tendencies.

In 1999 David North, international editorial board chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site*, wrote:

The objective modus operandi and social implications of the protracted stock market boom have enabled imperialism to recruit from among sections of the upper-middle class a new and devoted constituency. The reactionary, conformist and cynical intellectual climate that prevails in the United States and Europe—promoted by the media and adapted to by a largely servile and corrupted academic community—reflects the social outlook

of a highly privileged stratum of the population that is not in the least interested in encouraging a critical examination of the economic and political bases of its newly-acquired riches. [*A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990-2016*]

This social stratum and the political tendencies that reflect their interests have moved sharply to the right. The writings of Achcar and Smith show how, amid growing anger and mass disaffection with war in the working class, pseudo-left organizations are being integrated and recruited to play major roles in imperialist politics. The organizations and tendencies that were in the leadership of anti-war protests in the late 1960s and 1970s are now shamelessly pro-war. Workers, students and youth must understand this fact, and the social processes that underlie it, in order to build a new movement against the immense dangers that confront mankind.

The fight against imperialist war requires the systematic political exposure of the pro-imperialist pseudo-left. But this theoretical-political work is inseparably linked to the political organization and education of the working class and the broad mass of youth. It is within this powerful social force that the mass constituency for revolutionary opposition to imperialist war will be found. The Detroit conference called by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality—*Socialism vs. Capitalism and War*—will mark an important advance in the fight to build a new movement against war. We urge readers and supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* to come to Detroit on November 5 to participate in this critically important conference.



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