

# The ISO and the New America think tank denounce opposition to the war in Syria

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On October 11, as part of its campaign for an escalation of the US military intervention in Syria, the International Socialist Organization published on its *Socialist Worker* web site an interview with journalist Anand Gopal under the headline “A nightmare in the making for Mosul.”

Gopal served as the Afghanistan correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* and has contributed to publications such as *Foreign Policy*, the *Atlantic* and *Harpers*. The ISO’s relationship with Gopal is indicative of its political proximity to the state and the official institutions of the American political establishment.

Gopal is a fellow with the International Security Program of the New America think tank, previously known as the New America Foundation. New America is led by Anne-Marie Slaughter, a former high-ranking State Department official and close associate of Hillary Clinton.

New America’s Board of Directors includes *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, CNN commentator Fareed Zakaria, former Google CEO Eric Schmidt, auto bailout architect Steven Rattner, private investment CEO Jonathan Soros, other corporate executives, and university presidents. The think tank’s political positions are entirely in line with those of the American military and intelligence agencies and the corporate establishment.

By interviewing Gopal and uncritically advancing his pro-war positions, the ISO is seeking to provide a “left” cover for the imperialist war plans of the American ruling class. The first few questions put by interviewer Eric Ruder relate to Mosul, treating the question entirely from a military-tactical standpoint. Ruder begins by asking whether the US-orchestrated attack will “have the potential to deal a decisive blow to ISIS” and what the “humanitarian consequences” will be.

Gopal replies that the taking of Mosul will be “the deathblow to ISIS in Iraq.” He then acknowledges that there will be a “significant humanitarian cost,” noting that “a lot of civilians” have already been killed by US air strikes and “the death toll will only increase.” He mentions that the US is once again using white phosphorus, and cites the example of the US-backed assault on Ramadi, where the destruction was “unimaginable.”

In Fallujah, he continues, US-backed Shia militias arrested and executed thousands of Sunni residents, “and there have been reports of extremely brutal torture, using power drills and other horrific things.”

Ruder has nothing to say about the impending US-led bloodbath in Mosul matter-of-factly described by Gopal, shifting instead to

the question of Aleppo. The desperate situation facing civilians in the eastern part of that city in northern Syria, currently held by the Levant Conquest Front, the Al Qaeda-linked organization formerly known as the al-Nusra Front, has become the focus of agitation by Washington and its imperialist allies, fully backed by the ISO and other pseudo-left organizations, for an escalation of their war against the regime in Damascus and its Russian ally.

The ISO is demanding that the Obama administration take military action to halt the brutal Russian-backed offensive by Syrian government forces against Washington’s de facto Islamist militia allies in Aleppo, while giving tacit support to the US offensive in Mosul against ISIS, deemed an obstacle to the American drive for hegemony in the Middle East.

As the discussion shifts to Syria, the real political content of the interview emerges—a slanderous attack on all those who oppose the US war in Syria, based on the charge that opposition to the war equals support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. US imperialism, on the other hand, is portrayed as an ally of the Syrian masses.

The ISO’s questions are designed to allow Gopal to advance these false and reactionary conceptions. Ruder asks: “The Assad regime portrays all opposition to his regime as ‘terrorism’ and all Syrian military efforts as a contribution to fighting ISIS in the ‘war on terror.’ But what is the larger context in which the conflict in Syria is unfolding?”

Gopal replies: “Assad is actually the biggest cause of ISIS in Syria. The devastation that he’s wrought on Syrians is the main reason that ISIS even exists in Syria. And what’s remarkable about what’s happened over the last year is that US policy in Syria is essentially helping Assad.”

He criticizes the Obama administration for not doing enough to arm the so-called rebels: “Without giving the other rebels resources to enable them to extricate themselves, the rebels have no choice but to stick with Jabhat al-Nusra or be wiped out. Since they aren’t able to separate themselves from Al Qaeda, Assad uses this as a pretext to bomb these areas, as he has with devastating results in Aleppo.”

Gopal’s assertion that Assad is primarily to blame for the existence of ISIS is a lie used to whitewash the responsibility of American imperialism for the devastation of the entire region. The *World Socialist Web Site* holds no brief for the capitalist government of Assad, but it is a fundamental principle of Marxism that no support be given to efforts of imperialist powers to remove

regimes that have, for one reason or another, fallen afoul of their global intrigues and ambitions. That is the task of the working class in such countries, leading behind it all of the oppressed masses in a struggle against both the native bourgeoisie and imperialism.

And it is an undeniable fact that the United States has carried out one aggressive war and military intervention after another over the past 25 years with catastrophic consequences for the people of a vast region stretching from Central Asia to the Middle East to Northern Africa. Over a million have been killed, many millions more have been injured, tens of millions have been turned into refugees, and trillions of dollars have been squandered in illegal and predatory neo-colonial attacks. Successive US administrations have stoked up sectarian conflicts and armed religious-extremist militias to aid in the US occupation forces' repression of entire populations.

Central to the ISO's libel against opposition to the US intervention in Syria is the claim that the civil war in Syria is a "democratic revolution." The ISO ducks the question of how such a "revolution" could be led by forces supported by the United States, the NATO powers and their oil sheik allies.

In promoting this line, Ruder states: "Many on the left in Western countries believe that there is no popular resistance to Assad beyond Salafist forces like Jabhat a-Nusra. What's your opinion?"

Ruder asks later in the interview: "Setting aside those on the left who actually support Assad, there's another current, probably larger and more influential, that considers Islamic fundamentalist forces to be the chief threat and the Assad regime to be a lesser evil. They focus on the crimes of the US and Islamic fundamentalist forces, which they consider to be one and the same. What's your take on this outlook?"

By denouncing those who "focus on the crimes of the US," the ISO is aligning itself with US imperialism, serving as its miserable apologist. The implication of this position is that the United States is a progressive force and its interventions in the Middle East and elsewhere have a "humanitarian" content. On this basis, the ISO and other pseudo-left groups join with the most rabid and militaristic factions of the ruling class in support of a wider US war, supposedly to advance the "democratic revolution" in Syria.

Gopal provides grist for the ISO's pro-war mill when he gives the example of a group of civilians in the city of Deraya who opposed Assad and blames the US for failing to sufficiently defend the city against Syrian government attack. He attempts to portray the "rebels" as revolutionaries, and even socialists: "They want to overthrow the state. They want to overthrow the whole oppressive apparatus that has ruled their lives for the past four decades."

Responding to a question from Ruder about the threat posed by Islamist groups, he says: "Ultimately, if you're serious about wanting to defeat fundamentalism and Salafism in Syria, the first step has to be to end the regime of Assad, because as long as he's there, these forces are going to continue to be there."

There is, in all of this, not a trace of Marxism or socialism. There is no historical or class analysis of the civil war in Syria. It is discussed entirely from the standpoint of US foreign policy, given a "left" twist by means of impressionistic phrases about

"revolution" and emotional appeals on the basis of isolated episodes and disconnected facts.

The "rebel" groups fighting Assad are proclaimed to be "revolutionary" without any reference to political program or the role of the working class in Syria, Iraq or the United States.

The ISO sees no contradiction in a "revolutionary" group receiving weapons and military support from US imperialism. Elsewhere in the interview, Ruder asks: "So if there are forces that aren't Islamic fundamentalist and are opposed to the Assad regime, why wouldn't the US give them the support that they need to stand on their own?"

Here in a nutshell is the argument the ISO is making to the Obama administration, the Pentagon and the CIA, through middlemen such as Gopal and the New America think tank.

The pseudo-left is playing an increasingly important role in providing an ideological cover for a war drive that has very little popular support. When the ISO asks about the US elections, Gopal bemoans the fact that "Obama is loathe to put boots on the ground."

In Syria, Gopal claims, "Obama is being very hesitant to deputize the proxy forces." He criticizes Clinton for not going far enough in pushing for military escalation, complaining that "she wants to force Assad to the negotiating table." He continues, "She thinks that upping the pressure a little bit is what is needed to force a negotiated effort..."

The American pseudo-left is politically aligned with sections of the military-intelligence apparatus that openly advocate US war against the Russian-backed Syrian government. Such a war could quickly lead to a military confrontation between the world's two largest nuclear-armed powers.

The war-mongering interview with Gopal is not a political mistake. It is not an expression of naiveté or confusion. It is an expression of the class position and outlook of the ISO.

This organization speaks for privileged sections of the upper-middle class, tied materially to Wall Street and separated by a vast chasm from the working class. It is part of a social layer, once associated with opposition to war and imperialism, but on a middle-class basis, which has over the course of decades moved ever further to the right, landing squarely in the camp of imperialism.



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