



Condemn Assad and Putin's war crimes in Idlib

International Secretariat of the League for the Fifth International, 23.10.2017 Sun, 04/02/2018 - 09:38

International Secretariat of the League for the Fifth International, 23.10.2017

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that Bashar al-Assad's warplanes, artillery and barrel bombing helicopters have launched a major assault on the last extensive rebel-held region of Idlib, aided by their Russian allies. It is likely that the offensive aims to concentrate the population into a narrow pocket, subject them to final liquidation or to force them out of the region.

This despite the fact that the region was supposed to be a 'de-escalation' zone under the terms of an agreement brokered by Russia, Turkey and Iran last year. Also despite the savage irony that a Russian and Turkish sponsored 'Syrian national dialogue conference' opened in Sochi the day before the latest air attacks on Idlib; though all serious opposition forces, Syrian and Kurdish, have boycotted it.

There are already an estimated 1.1 million refugees from other parts of Syria in Idlib and the UN reports that the offensive, which started in January, has now resulted in 212,000 people fleeing the fighting. Conditions for them are unspeakably bad and UN officials have pleaded for a ceasefire and for aid to be sent to ease the suffering of people who are without tents, food or medical supplies.

The UK-based Observatory also reported another likely sarin gas attack on Khan Sheikhoun where, it said, 20 children and 17 women were among the dead civilians. Film footage shows convulsing and choking victims being doused with water and loaded into ambulances, with the bodies of around a dozen young children seen being laid out on blankets in a flatbed truck. The hospital at which victims were subsequently being treated was also bombed.

Of course, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and US President Donald Trump immediately condemned this atrocity. Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan has also condemned the assault on Idlib but since he is engaged in his own murderous assault on the Kurdish enclave of Afrin just to the north, his protests will carry little weight with the perpetrators. As for Britain and the USA, equally heinous tyrants, as vile as Assad, their words will also have no impact and will bring no relief.

The Americans themselves have bombed Idlib under the pretext that they are attacking the main militia forces of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), led by the former Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. In fact they seem to have reconciled themselves to Assad's recovery of Idlib. At the same time, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has indicated that 2,000 US troops will remain in northeast Syria for some time; citing the need to ensure IS does not recover and that Iran must not be allowed to establish a permanent base in Syria.

With regard to Assad's rule he was more equivocal. 'A murderer of his own people cannot generate the support required for long-term stability' he said, adding 'A stable, unified and independent Syria ultimately requires post-Assad leadership in order to be successful.' Note the word 'ultimately'.

In fact all of the outside states intervening in Syria are either imperialist powers (US and Russia) or regional repressive regimes, and all have their own geostrategic aims that are ultimately incompatible with one another. Erdogan wants a buffer zone between Turkey (that is, the Kurdish populated areas of eastern Anatolia) and the Kurdish regions of northern Syria, if he cannot liquidate these entirely. He hopes thereby to permanently crush the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Russia wishes to stabilise Syria under Assad or a regime successor who will remain a solid ally and provide a base for Russian planes and warships, in the process proving, as in the Crimea, that the US cannot push it out of important military assets. Assad naturally wants to hold on to power and restore his control over the entire country. Taken together with US and Iranian objectives, these aims are incompatible and in the short run achieving them is likely to lead to further flare-ups.

If, for the moment, in the proverbial thieves' kitchen there is a bargaining over the spoils, this does not mean that the knives have been sheathed, merely hidden under the table.

However, if Afrin falls to Turkey and their Syrian puppet forces, and Idlib falls to Assad, this will mark the final crushing of the Syrian uprising except, perhaps, for the Kurdish areas in the north east (Kobanê, Cizîrê?), which in any case always kept their distance from the Syrian Spring. Whilst the Kurdish forces aided Washington to liquidate the IS Caliphate, and US-troops are still stationed in Eastern Rojava, they have effectively been dropped by their 'protector' in Afrin, a tragic repetition of a decade of illusions in alliances with imperialist or regional oppressors. They could well find themselves between the 'rock' of Assad and Putin and the 'hard place' of Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Socialists around the world should call for an immediate end to the assaults on Idlib and on Afrin, a total end to the bombing, and the immediate supply of food, medical aid, and warm shelter for the suffering people. They need to solidarise with the more than a million strong population of Idlib and the surrounding region despite, the arch-reactionary policy of the Islamist forces and their crimes against the masses.

Despite the patent hypocrisy of their critics, Putin and Assad's repeated war crimes must also be condemned by the worldwide labour movement and, wherever this is possible, workers' sanctions, should be taken against them. Those 'Communists?', 'anti-imperialists?' and 'antiwar campaigners?' who either excuse these crimes, or even remain silent about them, need to be unequivocally and thoroughly shamed.

The criminal bombardment of Idlib and Ghouta, together with the Turkish invasion, could also be the opening of another round of reactionary clashes between regional and imperialist powers, opening another chapter in the nightmare of the people of Syria.

We call for the withdrawal of all the imperialist powers from Syria and the entire region - Russia, the USA and also the European powers. We demand the end of all arms supplies to the reactionary regimes of Assad or Erdogan, the withdrawal of all Turkish troops and support for Kurdish defence against the invasion.

It is not only the reactionary Islamists, pro-imperialist and nationalist leaders of the 'rebel areas' and the FSA who have failed the people and led the masses into a blind alley. The PYD-leadership has also led the Kurdish masses into a disastrous alliance with the US-imperialists. Only if the democratic and socialist forces and the nationally oppressed break with such a policy and unite on a revolutionary basis, can the wave of reaction be stopped.

Source URL: <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/condemn-assad-and-putin%E2%80%99s-war-crimes-idlib>