

Syria and the pro-imperialist ‘leftists’ of the ISO

By Bill Van Auken
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After more than a month-long silence on Syria, the International Socialist Organization has resumed its depiction of a bloody sectarian civil war stoked by imperialist intervention as the “Syrian Revolution.”

The ISO’s silence coincided with a heated policy debate within the US foreign policy establishment provoked by the storming of US consulate and CIA facilities in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi, resulting in the death of the US ambassador and three other Americans. The perpetrators of the attack appear to have been members of an Islamist militia linked to Al Qaeda, the very forces that Washington had used as proxies in the US-NATO war to overthrow the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

Given that the US and its allies are backing similar forces in the attempt to bring about regime-change in Syria, the events in Benghazi were cause for alarm, provoking divisions within US ruling circles.

That such a controversy should also give pause to the ISO is entirely understandable. Its “leftism” has consisted in providing “left” justifications for the policies pursued by the Obama administration as it conducts imperialist interventions in the name of democracy and humanitarianism.

The ISO broke its silence last week with the posting on its web site of an article entitled “Syria’s Revolutionary Resilience,” by Yusef Khalil.

The purpose of this piece is to re-energize the propaganda campaign waged over the last year and a half by the corporate-controlled media on behalf of the Syrian “rebels” and in support of Washington’s campaign to replace the regime of Bashar al-Assad with a more pliant puppet.

Khalil begins the article by dismissing the scattered reports that have appeared in the mass media acknowledging the crimes carried out by “rebel” forces, primarily directed at Alawite, Christian and other minorities. The veracity of these reports, however, has been bolstered by the Syrian “rebels” themselves, who have the habit of posting videos on the Internet of their own atrocities, depicting summary execution of soldiers and civilians alike, including throwing

government workers off of building tops and beheadings.

He describes as “regime apologists” anyone “casting doubt on the revolutionaries’ description of events.” This “description,” however, amounts to a carefully orchestrated PR campaign aimed at hastening a direct foreign imperialist intervention along the lines of the war in Libya, which was launched on the pretext of saving lives and ended with the slaughter of some 50,000 Libyans.

In particular, the article indicts the reporting of veteran Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk for having “wrongfully blamed the Free Syrian Army for the killing in Daraya.” This killing had been portrayed by the “rebels”—largely echoed by the mass media—as an unprovoked massacre by the pro-Assad forces. The event prompted demands from Western capitals for the immediate downfall of the Syrian regime.

Unlike most of the media, Fisk, rather than relying on the word of “rebel” spokesman, actually went to Daraya and spoke to survivors of the bloodletting. They told him that the anti-Assad militias had seized the town, holding its residents hostage and killing many of them, including off-duty conscript soldiers and a postman—because he worked for the government—as well as women and children.

Such reporting is anathema to the ISO. To sustain the illusion that the armed militias battling the Syrian regime are carrying out some kind of social revolution, it is necessary to cast the atrocities carried out by the pro-Assad forces as totally one-sided and unique, rather than acknowledging that such crimes are being carried out by both sides in what has become a bloody sectarian civil war fanned by the imperialist powers.

The other task of Khalil’s article is even more insidious—and preposterous. It is to deny that imperialism plays any role whatsoever in the Syrian conflict. Here he is forced to resort to bald-faced lies.

“For all the talk about foreign flow of weapons and support for the revolutionaries, nothing of any substance has made it to the fighters in Syria,” he writes. Moreover, he contends, regional powers—including Turkey—“cannot host

such operations without risking their own internal destabilizations.”

Here the author must be counting on complete ignorance on the part of his readers. Not only is Turkey hosting operations to train and arm the Syrian “rebels,” it has sent its own army officers into Syria to direct their military operations.

The Turkish government has also allowed the CIA to set up a command-and-control center in Adana, Turkey, site of the US Incirlik Air Base, just 60 miles from Syria’s northern border. From there it coordinates the flow of arms, foreign fighters, money and supplies into Syria. It was revealed early last month that Obama had signed an “intelligence finding” authorizing a sharp escalation of the CIA intervention.

The Saudi and Qatari monarchies have put up some \$300 million to pay the anti-Assad fighters and bribe members of the Syrian military to defect, while US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced just on Friday another \$45 million in so-called non-lethal aid to the “rebels.”

US satellites, German warships and British facilities in Cyprus are all relaying intelligence to the “rebels” to help prepare their attacks on the regime’s forces.

To further dismiss any concern over imperialist designs on Syria, Khalil cites an article by the “Syrian Marxist” Salamah Kailah—published in *Al Hayat*, the mouthpiece of the Saudi monarchy. Kailah advances the unique argument that because the US is “in a period of deep structural economic crisis,” and because its hegemonic position is being challenged, particularly by China, it can no longer engage in militarist aggression abroad.

What a profound “Marxist” insight! Deep economic crisis and the rise of new global powers preclude war. Is that what the 20th century taught him?

It is precisely US capitalism’s historic crisis and the challenge it faces from economic rivals that constitute the driving force of the global eruption of American militarism. Spurred on by the eruption of mass working class struggles last year in Tunisia and Egypt that threatened US domination, it is pursuing the most far-ranging redivision of the Middle East since the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 so as to assert US control over the region’s energy reserves and deny it to its rivals. The attempt to topple the regime in Syria—Tehran’s principal ally in the region—is itself only a stepping stone in the already advanced preparations for a US-Israeli war on Iran itself.

For a so-called “socialist” or “Marxist” to deny these threats is nothing short of criminal.

But what the article goes on to make clear is that the ISO does not see US military intervention as a threat, but rather as a potential source of progressive change. Khalil writes

that “regardless of the debates for or against intervention in Syria, it’s obvious that Western powers are moved by questions of self-interest, not by lobbying efforts.”

He continues: “Those of us in the West who support the Syrian revolution—and those of us in Syria who are active in the Syrian Revolution—cannot dictate to the US the terms of its involvement...”

“The point of saying this is not to place conditions on the Syrian Revolution, but because we want the revolution to succeed, and because we, along with the Syrian revolutionary left, see the strategy of betting on foreign intervention as a danger that threatens the revolution.”

What is he saying? The danger to the Syrian revolution lies not in a direct US military intervention, but rather in placing all one’s bets on that, as far as the author is concerned, desirable outcome. As much as one might hope for such an intervention “lobbying efforts” won’t help.

The ISO, he makes clear, is not about to place any “conditions on the Syrian Revolution,” i.e., that it oppose imperialism and defend Syria against US military conquest and the imposition of a puppet regime controlled by Washington. If the Syrian “revolutionaries” see this as the best means of achieving their aims, they will enjoy the full support of the pseudo-leftists of the ISO.

This misnamed organization, whose politics reflect the interests of a privileged layer of the upper-middle class, represents nothing more than the “left” flank of the conspiracy being carried out by the CIA, the State Department and the corporate media to prepare a new and far bloodier war for control of the Middle East.

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