

The petty-bourgeois “left” promotes the CIA war in Syria

By Alex Lantier
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The petty-bourgeois “left” has reacted to the publication of detailed reports on the CIA’s role in backing Islamist forces in the US proxy war in Syria by intensifying their support for the war. Forces like the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the United States and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France are functioning as conscious propagandists for a neo-colonial CIA operation.

The ISO’s April 9 article by Yusef Khalil, “Why the left must support Syria’s revolution”—which cites Gayath Naïssé, one of the NPA’s main writers on Syria—begins by slandering opponents of the CIA war in Syria as supporters of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Khalil begins, “‘Airlift to Rebels in Syria Expands with CIA’s Help,’ screamed a *New York Times* headline in late March. ‘Foreign intervention!,’ screamed back supporters of the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad.” He continues, “Some on the US and international left continue to cling to the idea that the regime presiding over this violence and repression is progressive—and that the uprising against it was engineered by Western governments.”

Khalil’s statement, which mocks the idea that Western imperialism is behind the Syrian war, stands in blatant contradiction to the widely-acknowledged fact that the CIA and its regional allies are arming the opposition to destabilize Syria and topple Assad. The implication that all opposition to the US war comes from “supporters of the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad” is a slander and a political lie. It is aimed at blocking a struggle to mobilize the working class in struggle against both the Assad regime and, above all, the intervention in Syria of the most ruthless sections of American imperialism.

By ruling out such a struggle, Khalil is supporting a bloody CIA operation and, behind it, the Middle East policy of US imperialism, whose war in Syria has had devastating consequences for the Syrian people.

Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, and Turkey helped purchase and transport a “cataract of weaponry” coordinated by the CIA into Syria, in the words of one US official cited in the *Times*’ March article, which is friendly to the Syrian opposition. The paper “conservatively” estimates the quantity of munitions sent to Syria at 3,500 tons. In the ensuing fighting, some 70,000 Syrians have died, and nearly 5 million have been forced to flee their homes.

US foreign policy experts have stated that Washington’s shock troops are the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front, which still receives support apparently unhindered by the CIA—even though Washington declared Al Nusra a terrorist organization last December. (See also: Washington’s proxy in Syria: Al Qaeda)

The ISO statement makes clear that it supports the anti-Assad militias’ decision to take weapons from the CIA. Khalil writes, “The vital question facing the Syrian opposition is how to get aid from

sources that can provide what the revolution needs, which is weapons, while maintaining independent Syrian decision-making. This is a tough question to answer, but not impossible.”

Khalil’s claim that one can maintain “independent Syrian decision-making” while taking arms from the CIA is an absurd fiction, concocted to disguise the fact that the ISO is supporting a war coordinated and organized by Washington.

As US officials speaking to the *Times* made clear, weapons shipments are closely overseen by the CIA. The *Times* writes, “American intelligence officers have helped the Arab governments shop for weapons, including a large procurement from Croatia, and have vetted rebel commanders and groups to determine who should receive the weapons as they arrive, according to American officials speaking on condition of anonymity.”

It adds that former CIA director David Petraeus was “instrumental in helping to get this aviation network moving and had prodded various countries to work together on it.”

The open support of the ISO and the European petty-bourgeois “left” for CIA-led wars is a culmination of their evolution as pro-imperialist bourgeois parties, operating in the periphery of the Democratic Party in the United States or of the social-democratic parties in Europe.

Staggered by the outbreak of a global economic crisis with the Wall Street crash of 2008, they have supported the ruling class in each country as it has sought to impose the burden of the crisis on the working class. While they have promoted sellouts by the union bureaucracy of workers’ struggles against austerity at home, their role abroad has been even more nakedly aligned with imperialist policy.

After the outbreak of revolutionary struggles by the Tunisian and Egyptian working class in 2011, they supported US-led interventions to overthrow regimes Washington viewed as obstacles to its interests—first the 2011 war in Libya and then the war in Syria. They did so, falsely claiming that the forces that were carrying out these wars were revolutionary.

Khalil’s attempts to dress up the ISO’s pro-imperialist positions with a bit of “left” rhetoric, claiming that accepting CIA help was a revolutionary necessity, involve him in absurd falsifications.

He writes, “Syria’s revolutionaries—responding to the dictatorship’s violent crackdown—had to develop a popular armed resistance to defend themselves and defeat the forces of the regime. Large parts of the country, including major military bases and airports, have fallen from the government’s hands, but they remain under heavy bombardment. Nevertheless, in many of these areas, Syrians are experimenting with local self-government, now that the regime has lost its grip.”

The ISO's fantasy that Syrians are now experimenting with radical forms of self-government under the jackboot of ultra-right, sectarian Islamist militias armed by the CIA is ludicrous. Syrian workers in opposition-controlled areas are either simply trying to survive as Islamist guerrillas loot their workplaces, schools, and homes, or are actively protesting the opposition's thuggery.

A series of interviews in the *Guardian* with opposition militia forces in Aleppo last December laid out the basic character of the Islamist militias, which plunder the population for cash to buy CIA weapons. One militia commander said, "I liberate an area, I need resources and ammunition, so I start looting government properties. When this is finished, I turn to looting other properties and I become a thief."

Another opposition official noted the death of an opposition fighter, Abu Jameel, in a fight with other militias over how to divide the loot from the seizure of a steel warehouse. He said, "To be killed because of a feud over loot is a disaster for the revolution. It is extremely sad. There is not one government institution or warehouse left standing in Aleppo. Everything has been looted. Everything is gone."

Given Aleppo's role as the center of Syria's state-run pharmaceutical industry, the opposition's raids on factories and other state facilities have had a devastating impact. Critical medicines are running out, notably diabetes medications and antibiotics. State flights carrying vaccines into Syria have been shot at, and chlorine for water purification is banned for import by the imperialist powers under the pretext that Assad could use it to create chemical weapons—resulting in a spread of water-borne diseases.

Abdul-Jabbar Akidi, a former Syrian army colonel and a leading official in the opposition's military council in Aleppo, confessed that there is deep popular hostility in Aleppo to his forces: "Even the people are fed up with us. We were liberators, but now they denounce us and demonstrate against us."

The ISO and the NPA have maintained a studious silence on popular protests against the Islamist, CIA-led opposition forces they have promoted. These protests are, however, one indication that a revolution based on the working class in Syria would take the form of an uprising against the opposition forces supported by Washington and the ISO, as well as against the Assad regime.

Struggling to find a bright side to the reactionary forces it is promoting in Syria, the ISO writes: "It would be wrong to reduce the Syrian Revolution to the question of the armed struggle and the role of imperialist powers in trying to shape and co-opt that struggle. Take the role of women in the uprising—something that has not been appreciated in the mainstream media. Women have been very active participants and leaders since the beginning ... As a group of women activists in Aleppo wrote, 'We will not wait until the regime falls to become active.'"

The ISO's presentation of CIA-backed Islamic fundamentalists as defenders of women's rights is absurd and repugnant. Should Al Qaeda-type forces conquer Syria with US and Saudi help, Syrian women—who largely lived in modern conditions under the secular Assad regime—will be forced to live under conditions like those faced by women under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan or in Saudi Arabia. There, women are considered legal minors and are denied basic rights, including the right to drive a car.

As it turns out, the Aleppo women activists the ISO cynically held up as examples of the opposition's supposedly progressive character have not fared well. "In early March, the revolutionary local council in Aleppo was elected and didn't include a single woman, despite some well-known female activists being nominated," the ISO writes,

complacently adding: "So there is—like everywhere in the world—some distance to go before women have equality in Syria."

The ISO's attempts to somewhat distance itself from Washington's Middle East policy likewise reek of dishonesty and cynicism. Khalil writes, "Like every other regional and international power, the US government has its fingers in Syria. It is maneuvering to shape—and ultimately, to curtail—the Syrian Revolution ... Throughout the carnage inflicted by the regime, the US has kept very tight limits on the support, especially the military support, it has provided."

Khalil quotes the NPA's Naïssé on the reasons for US involvement in Syria: "The major imperialist powers, led by the United States, have always supported what they call an 'orderly transition' in Syria, which means only superficial and partial changes to the structure of the regime. This is for geo-strategic reasons, including protecting the Zionist entity [i.e., Israel] and preventing the revolution from succeeding and spreading to the entire Arab east, including the reactionary oil monarchies."

Leaving aside the false dichotomy Khalil establishes between US policy and the CIA-led war he calls "the Syrian Revolution," these passages make one point clear: the policies supported by the ISO and the NPA are in fact entirely compatible with the strategy of American imperialism. These include keeping Persian Gulf oil revenues under the control of reactionary, pro-US monarchs, and maintaining the division of the Middle Eastern working class between Jewish and Muslim workers that is established by the existence of the Israeli state.

Although neither the ISO nor the NPA say it, the US war against Syria also aims to deprive Iran of its main regional ally, thereby facilitating US preparations for a major war against Iran. The ultimate goal of these operations is to ensure that Washington maintains and extends its hegemony over the oil-rich, strategically located Middle East. This goal is entirely supported by the petty-bourgeois "left" parties.

If Washington has concerns about the anti-Assad "rebels," it is not that they are revolutionary. Rather, it fears that if it arms its Islamist proxies in Syria too heavily, they might turn these weapons over to dissident Islamist factions inside the unstable Persian Gulf monarchies, or use them to mount terrorist attacks on Israel or the United States.

Inside Syria itself, war unleashed by the CIA-backed opposition—recruited from layers of Syria's Sunni Muslim majority (discontented with the Assad regime, whose ruling personnel is drawn from the minority Alawites)—has developed largely along sectarian lines. It is thus returning Syrian society to conditions that existed under French colonial rule in the early 20th century. At that time, French troops and proxy forces maintained French control of Syria by setting Christians, Druze, Sunni, Alawite, and other Syrians against each other.

The US-backed opposition is thus reactionary in the classical sense of the term: it returns society towards a more primitive and oppressive past.

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