

A new ‘left’ appeal for imperialist intervention in Syria

By Bill Van Auken
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On February 27, the *New York Review of Books* published an open letter signed by some 200 people, many of them identifying themselves as activists, academics, writers and journalists. Originally titled “Stop pretending that you can’t do anything to save Syrians,” the headline was subsequently changed to “The World Must Act Now on Syria.”

The letter was published with no introduction. Who wrote the text of the letter, who changed its title, how the signatures were gathered and indeed all other information about the document is left in the dark.

Its purpose, however, is crystal clear. Issued in the midst of a massive war propaganda campaign in the Western media over the Russian and Syrian government assault on the Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta, one of the last strongholds of the Islamist militias backed by Washington and its regional allies, the letter constitutes an open appeal to the US and the other imperialist powers to launch a full-scale military intervention.

Like the media propaganda campaign of which it is an integral part, the “open letter” constitutes a thoroughly one-sided, false and deeply hypocritical portrayal of the Syrian developments.

It protests solely “the crimes that the Assad regime has committed against Syrians, aided by local and foreign militias, by Iranian strategic and financial aid, by Russian airpower and mercenaries.”

Noticeably absent from its concerns are the crimes carried out by US and the other imperialist powers in Syria, not to mention the broader region. The authors of the open letter and its signatories were not motivated to make any such appeal as US airstrikes and artillery bombardments razed the cities of Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria to the ground, burying tens of thousands of their inhabitants in the rubble.

Just days after the issuance of the letter, it was reported that the Pentagon had deployed another 600 special forces troops, backed by armor, to the strategically vital area of El Tanf on the Iraqi border. Far from protesting such an intervention, those who drafted the open letter want more—much more—of the same.

Chiding the imperialist governments, the letter declares: “Those with the power to act have been generous with expressions of sympathy but have offered nothing beyond the

wish that this war on civilians—which they grotesquely call a ‘civil war’—would end. They call on ‘all parties’ to show restraint, even though one side alone has a virtual monopoly on violence.”

The imperialists have “offered nothing”? The Assad government maintains a “monopoly on violence”? Who do they think they are kidding? The CIA, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the other reactionary Sunni oil sheikdoms poured tens of thousands of tons of arms and ammunition and billions of dollars into Syria to arm Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias that carried out a reign of terror across Syria. Tens of thousands of foreign fighters were funneled into the country and paid to serve as proxy ground forces in the US-orchestrated war for regime change aimed at toppling the government of President Bashar al-Assad. Somewhere between 130,000 and 170,000 government troops and militia members supporting the Assad regime have been killed fighting these CIA-backed forces.

The letter writes off the United Nations as “ineffectual,” adding, “While there are no longer any illusions about the role of the Security Council, every member state has nevertheless adopted and pledged to uphold the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine...”

“For the agony of the people of Syria to come to an end, it must be forcibly stopped,” the document continues, adding that there “are myriad geopolitical reasons why this is an imperative, but none as immediate and important as the sanctity of life and the exercise of free will.”

The message is clear: world imperialism must take action! Military intervention is required. The “myriad geopolitical reasons” for such action go unstated, but are nonetheless clear to anyone familiar with the complex struggle in Syria. US imperialism sees both Russia’s and Iran’s influence in the country as an obstacle to its own bloody and protracted struggle for hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East, a struggle that has left literally millions of victims in its wake. With their talk about the “sanctity of life,” the authors of the letter not only mock these victims, but offer their services in providing window dressing for Washington’s bloody operations.

The signatories to this reactionary document represent a disparate and dubious group that includes no small number of direct imperialist agents, emigre “assets” of one or another

Western intelligence agency and, no doubt, some roped in on false pretenses and by means of a hollow appeal to “human rights” sentiments.

Among those signing the document are individuals who have a long and direct experience in imperialism’s operations in the region. One such person is Burhan Ghalioun, the former head of the Syrian National Council, who served as a conduit for the money and arms poured into the Syrian Islamist militias by the CIA and the reactionary Sunni monarchies.

There are others, such as Moncef Marzouki, the former Tunisian president who played a key role in strangling the revolutionary uprising of the working class in that country and aligning Tunisia with the reactionary wars that Washington and its European allies have waged in Libya and Syria.

Also putting his name on the list was Saad Bin Tefla, a former Kuwaiti government minister and media tycoon.

Joining such figures—and no doubt playing the key role in fashioning the letter’s phony human rights rhetoric, which echoes the propaganda used to justify every major imperialist intervention from the Balkans to Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and beyond—is a collection of self-described “socialists” and “leftists”.

These include Gilbert Achcar, a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London and the principal spokesman on the Middle East for the Pabloite United Secretariat and its website *International Viewpoint*. Having backed the imperialist interventions in both Libya and Syria, Achcar has gone beyond mere propagandizing for war, meeting with Syrian National Council (SNC) officials, a collection of US and French intelligence assets, to advise them on the best strategy to bring about direct imperialist intervention.

Also among the signatories is Eric Ruder, a prominent member of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US and writer for its publication *Socialist Worker*. Like Achcar and *International Viewpoint*, the ISO has supported the imperialist intervention in Syria from its outset, providing reporting and analysis that are, in all essentials, indistinguishable from State Department propaganda.

Dan La Botz, co-editor of *New Politics* and a leading member of Solidarity who recently joined the Democratic Socialists of America, also signed the letter. Like the ISO, *New Politics* has its roots in the political tendency founded by Max Shachtman, who broke with the Trotskyist movement in 1940 and later became a champion of US imperialist intervention in Korea and Vietnam.

Also signing the letter is Michael Karadjis, a member of the Australian pseudo-left organization, Socialist Alliance, with a long and filthy record of promoting imperialist interventions around the world in the name of “human rights,” from Kosovo to Timor, Libya and Syria. On Syria, he has authored pieces justifying a Syrian “rebel” commander eating the organs from the body of a slain soldier as only “minor cannibalism” and

praising both the 2015 Turkish shoot-down of a Russian warplane and the Trump administration’s firing of 59 cruise missiles at a Syrian airbase last April.

None of these pseudo-left signatories, who invoke the brutality of the government of Bashar al-Assad to promote imperialist intervention in Syria, have anything to do with genuine socialism or Marxism. Assad’s regime, like those throughout the oppressed former colonial countries of the Middle East, is ultimately an expression of the incapacity of the national bourgeoisie to carry through either a genuine struggle against imperialism or a restructuring of the old colonial forms of rule along democratic lines.

As Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution established, that task can be accomplished only by the working class through the revolutionary overthrow of these regimes as part of the global struggle for socialism. It cannot—as these pseudo-lefts would have it—be contracted out to imperialism and its Islamist proxies.

Achcar gives their game away in a recent interview with *International Viewpoint*. Pointing to the Pentagon’s use of the Syrian Kurdish militia as its principal proxy ground force, he dismisses “anti-imperialism”—which he placed in quotes—as a perspective that “does not fit the situation” in Syria, where “the United States supports ... a progressive force in its fight against a reactionary enemy.”

All of these pseudo-left elements are aligning their politics directly with those of US imperialism and in particular with those sections of the US military and intelligence apparatus that are demanding a more aggressive confrontation with Russia. Not only are they functioning as direct accessories to the crimes committed against the masses of Syria, but they are helping to pave the way to world war.

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