

Peace in Syria: The Chinese Solution

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There is a solution for peace in Syria. All we need is the will to implement it. Yang Jiechi has imagined a way of avoiding France's hostility to the implementation of the Geneva agreement.

The truce that was intended to mark the celebrations for the Muslim feast of the Aid was massively broken in Syria. The government had taken care to block the main roads in order to ensure that any incidents would remain isolated and would not spread. It was a waste of time – a number of brigades of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) had received orders from their sponsors to launch a series of new attacks, and the Syrian Arab Army did not fail to respond. As a result, although certain regions were able to enjoy four days of relative peace, the final assessment at the national level is particularly disappointing.

Whether the truce was a success or a failure therefore depends on where you live. At the diplomatic level, it allows us to evaluate the difficulties that the peace forces will encounter when the Security Council decides to deploy them. The first is the absence of a representative spokesman for the FSA – the second is France's duplicity.

The FSA is composed of a number of armed groups, each of which obeys its own logic. The whole organisation is supposed to take orders from a central command which is implanted at a NATO base in Turkey. But this is no longer the case, ever since the emergence of bitter rivalry between the different sponsors – France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Each group dedicates more effort to expanding their influence to the detriment of their allies than to overthrowing the regime. The basic brigades obey the groups who directly finance them, and pay no further attention to NATO coordination. Besides this, despite all declarations, the fighters in Syria have never been subordinated to the political councils who meet in Paris, Istanbul and Cairo.

Western leaders are continually calling for a unified FSA command, but in reality, they are afraid of it. Because while unification would provide an interlocutor for peace discussions, it would also discredit and replace the foreign political councils. It would therefore no longer be possible to hide the true nature of this pseudo "revolution" – none of the armed groups are fighting for democracy, and the vast majority of them intend to impose a Sunnite religious dictatorship.

A "Central Command of Syrian Revolutionary Councils" has just been created in Idlib, and it has been approved by about 80% of the FSA forces. It recognises as its spiritual leader Sheikh Adnan al-Arour, who gave a speech on this occasion. Reading a moderate text, whose style was very different from his usual declarations, he praised his listeners for the creation of the central military command, and called for the unification of the three rival foreign political councils, and also for the constitution of a legislative council. This of course

means the transfer of legislative power to religious authorities – of which he would humbly accept the leadership – with the aim of imposing Sharia law. He also reminded his listeners that the prime objective of the “revolution” is not to overthrow the institutions but rather the principles of the regime, in other words, secularism and Arab nationalism.

At this point, it must be noted that while the FSA numbers very few Syrian combatants, it has the support of several million civilians, particularly in the North of the country. However, in the various demonstrations which have been organised, the demonstrators have never brandished the portraits of exiled political leaders (Buhran Ghalioum, Abdulbaset Sieda, etc.), but have often chanted the name of Sheikh Al-Arour. They have also notably used his slogans, such as “Christians to Beirut! Alawites to the grave!” The Syrians who support the FSA do not want democracy, but are calling for a Saudi-style dictatorship, which would cleanse Sunnism of its Sufi elements, and repress all religious minorities.

In order to succeed, the truce should have been negotiated by Lakdhar Brahimi, the special envoy of the UN and the Arab League, and Sheikh Adnan Al-Arour. But such an encounter would have marked the end of the dream of the “Arab Spring”, and revealed the fact that the West is financing and arming the most extreme forms of religious sectarianism.

The second obstacle to the deployment of a peace-keeping force by the Security Council would be French intransigence. Paris is blocking the implementation of the agreement which was signed on the 30th of June in Geneva. The text drawn up by Kofi Annan is deliberately vague on certain points, which enables the major powers to sign it and then postpone the resolution of any remaining contradictions. Since that date, Washington, Moscow and Beijing have come to an agreement, but Paris persists in remaining aloof.

The question is which Syrian opposition has the legitimacy to participate in a political transition, and what would be the nature of this transition. For France, it’s obvious that the Syrian National Council, whose abundantly subsidized members are presently living in Paris, must form the hard core of the next government. For Moscow and Beijing, however, those politicians who supported armed action and called for foreign intervention are unworthy of their country, and the only legitimate actors are the opposition forces who have defended the independence and sovereignty of their nation. For France, the prime concern is to organise transition between a Syria governed by Bashar el-Assad (without Total 1 [1]), and a Syria without el-Assad (but with Total). For Moscow and Beijing, the transition must consist of moving beyond the current situation of division and civil war to a state of national unity and peace. As for Washington, they are prepared to make concessions as long as the situation is resolved quickly and a regional flare-up is avoided.

Drawing from lessons learned during the Aid ceasefire, China has just proposed an original solution. Instead of presenting a plan orchestrated by political stages, it has imagined the possibility of solving the problem region by region. This procedure would make it possible to inverse the current process of expanding conflict and, on the contrary, to reduce the war zones. This solution is in everyone’s interest, but is in direct opposition to French strategy – speaking at the UN General Assembly, president François Hollande asked for a Security Council mandate on the “liberated zones.” Paris is entertaining nostalgic dreams of the mandate awarded to France by the League of Nations [2], which legitimized its conquest of Syria (1920-1946). And have they not already managed to influence the “revolutionaries” to adopt the flag of colonisation?

In a speech at the National University of Singapore, Kofi Annan underlined the fact that the responsibility for the current situation rests on the shoulders of certain Western states – they hijacked the Security Council mandate for the protection of the population of Libya and transformed it into an operation for changing the el-Gaddafi regime. Today, they refuse to condemn terrorism, and are pushing the Syrian population to martyrdom in the hope of finding the opportunity to overthrow the el-Assad regime.

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Translation Pete Kimberley

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