

## Syria: Feeding Off the Carcase

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An uncle of mine, a quite extraordinary individual, used to say that he was privileged to have a 'ringside seat' when viewing the rampages of capitalism. To which I must add that the ticket to gain admission has been extremely costly, for the planet, but not for my uncle in spite of his lefty leanings. But privileged he was, as all of us are here in the West, insulated from the worst extremes of Empire by all those dead brown bodies.

The recent outburst by Tariq Ali that I referred to [here](#) illustrates the dilemma of being little more than a spectator to events, something the Western left has been for some decades. Making pronouncements on entire countries existence, as if they belong to them, which of course in a way they do.

Edward Said wrote reams about it, calling it '[Orientalism](#)', the idea that countries, especially those of the Arab world, exist only as inventions in the minds (and actions) of us in the West. We have similar inventions for Africa, still called you will not be surprised to hear "The Dark Continent" on the BBC as recently as a couple of weeks ago. A throwaway comment no doubt but it illustrates the contradiction of any of us here in the West, allegedly of the left, or right, passing judgment on the goings on in our former colonies or in the case of Syria, also a relic of the Cold War. A double-whammy for Syria, the last-remaining secular Arab state in the region.

Therefore, it's not surprising that in their present form, all the countries currently getting 'democratized' (or not) exist by virtue of their former colonial masters. Borders, languages, as well as the irreparable damage that colonizing did to indigenous cultures, are still subjected to the Western 'gaze', decades after they allegedly gained their independence. 'On the Arab street, blah, blah...

The Baa'thist regime exists in its present form by virtue of its colonial and Cold War history. In every sense of the word, Syria is a Western creation, caught between two strategic interests, the denouement of which seems to be imminent, and apparently, the sooner the better according to Tariq Ali. That well may be but is it for us to decide who lives and who dies and to pronounce on how?

Does Ali really believe in some kind of post-Assad 'democracy' coming to pass as a result of Western 'pressure'? What like the one they've got in Libya? How easy it is for us to make pronouncements about what other people should and shouldn't do, especially so when Ali is a citizen of the country at the forefront of inflicting barbarity on the planet and according to credible reports the UK is already involved in what now looks like a [Western-inspired 'civil war'](#) in Syria with a pedigree (if that's the right word) going back to imperial shenanigans in the 1950s.

The urge to interfere seems by now to be a genetic inheritance for us in the West. Constantly making pronouncements about other peoples' lives and cultures as not matching up to ours. 'Assad has to go'. Oh really? Who says? Well all the leaders of NATO, the semi-feudal dictatorships of the Gulf states and of course, Tariq Ali.

That the Russians and Chinese have also called for Assad to step down, we should be clear as to why they have finally taken this position: that it's for purely selfish strategic reasons, fearing that an invasion by the West would install its own puppet government, thus bringing the Empire yet another step closer to Russia's borders.

That the argument should hinge on Assad and his regime points to a complete lack of understanding of why it's important for us to stop any kind of interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Perhaps then the people of these countries will truly have the freedom to make their own decisions about their future for better or for worse. Isn't this what we claim, that we in the 'civilized' countries have already accomplished and apparently it has also given us the right to stop other countries from doing the same? What a contradiction! What hypocrisy, from so-called left or right.

Personally I'd like to see a real socialist revolution in Syria, but better still, I'd like to see one here first, then perhaps Syria will be spared the torment of being 'democratized'. Does Ali really believe that with the defeat of Assad that the Empire would allow a truly democratic system to flourish in Syria? Like the one they've got in Iraq perhaps, which is busy [hanging its former bureaucrats](#).

Ali's comment that the "Syrian people are doing their best [to overthrow Assad]" is frankly a total copout, inserted to try and justify his call for Assad to go. What does Ali know about what the 'Syrian people are doing' or want for that matter? No more than I do that's for sure. But clearly the country is divided over the issue, though whether the majority are prepared to take up arms in the cause of the 'revolution' is not apparent.

Elsewhere I've been accused of saying that Ali is for foreign intervention. I have said no such thing. Ali quite clearly states that he is against any foreign intervention. The problem is that Western intervention has already happened, so the issue is somewhat moot. An excellent piece by Fiona Hill sums it up perfectly when she says, "Syria's 'Arab Spring': failed or hijacked?"

"Massive reform of the political process is non-controversial in Syrians' conversation, but I could not find any Syrian with anything positive to say about these two entities [Syrian National Council and the Syrian Free Army] touted by the Western world as the best instruments for political reform in Syria.

"'Why would any country invite expatriates to form government?' Syrians kept asking me with exasperation. 'Why would any civilian population put their faith in defected fighters with no discernible political platform?'

"I spoke to Sunnis, Shias, and Christians, to Kurds, Arabs, Circassians, Assyrians and Armenians. While many pointedly complimented the apparent good character of the president (referred to at such times as 'Dr Bashar Al Assad') all readily expressed in detail their disgust at poor governance for too long. In the street, in shared taxi vans, in cafes, markets, and private homes the Syrians are not afraid to talk politics any more. Indeed they seemed

particularly anxious to do so. But their mood is pessimistic. 'Whatever revolution there was is now destroyed by armed criminals and their masters,' sighed a Sunni man wearily." — [‘Syria’s ‘Arab Spring’: failed or hijacked?’](#), The Drum – Opinion 14 February 2012

Just as with Libya, the removal of Assad and the Ba’ath Socialist Party will mean the complete takeover of the Syrian economy by Western corporates and the commensurate privatization of state property and the dismantling of its social welfare system as the price to pay for being ‘democratized’.

But hopefully, for some Syrians their gaze stretches as far as Greece where they can see how ‘democracy’ really treats its citizens. Thus Ali’s call for a democratic government in Syria rings hollow in the face of the Empire’s onslaught on what’s left of the gains made since the end of WWII.

I might add that Tariq Ali is not alone amongst the Western left in supporting the idea of the overthrow of Assad as some kind of ‘step forward’, though toward what end remains a mystery to me.

“Writing in the January 7 Socialist Worker, Simon Assaf argues that whereas “it is clear that Western powers hope to gain from Assad’s demise,” and that “Fears of Western interference were given credibility when the Arab League joined in the international campaign of sanctions against Syria,” there is in fact no such danger! Rather, “the notion that ordinary Syrians struggling to change their country are the pawns of a ‘Western plot’ is absurd” and “In fact the Arab League is attempting to throw the regime a lifeline.”” — [‘Britain’s Socialist Workers Party covers for imperialist regime change in Syria’](#), WSWS, 15 February 2012

The operative phrase here is “Syrians...are the pawns of a Western plot”. Who is saying this? Where did this phrase come from? I’ve never read anything, anywhere, written by the Western left in all its bewildering variety that has asserted so. Definitely not amongst the most well known. So who is the real pawn on the Left here?

But that Western plots are hatched against the Syrian people and state is well documented. Felicity Arbuthnot broke an [excellent piece](#) on the subject of USUK imperialist plots against Syria that bear a remarkable resemblance to the events of the past six months. Not surprisingly, the story didn’t make it past the pages of the independent media.

The Socialist Worker [article](#) as a whole parrots the Western line almost in its entirety and reflects the deeply opportunist position of the SWP that talks of working class revolution in the midst of an armed uprising, conducted not by the masses but by two Western-funded and backed groups, the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Council (about which the article says “mark[s] a dangerous development”). In other words it seeks to exploit rather than understand the forces at work here, the implication being that the ‘revolution’ was crushed by Assad’s army, which may well be true, or not. It’s equally likely that the Assad regime responded to an armed attack by groups who did not represent the majority. Groups funded by NATO countries and intent on destabilizing the country in order to justify a NATO invasion or bring down the regime (another ‘coalition of the willing’). Either way, it’s still an issue for the Syrians themselves to sort out, if it’s not already too late.

No one can actually produce very much evidence of what has actually taken place in Syria, it’s anybody’s guess and the media have made sure that it stays that way. It’s a replay of

the Libya scenario what with African (Black) mercenaries and citizens being bombed by Gaddafi's airforce, both used to justify the slaughter and total destruction of what used to be the richest nation on the African continent, warts an' all.

Were there a genuine revolution taking place in Syria we can be sure it would not only look very different from the Empire-inflicted chaos that has descended on Syria but as with Bahrain (or Honduras, remember Honduras?), the Empire would take a rather different approach to the subject of Syrian 'democracy'.

Let's face it, most in the Western left want a nice, 'clean' revolution with no terrible moral/political dilemmas to cloud the issues that makes decision-making messy, even dirty. No ragged edges and no paradoxes involving Lenin's 'many a strange bedfellow'. I'm tempted to say bull\*\*it but I won't.

Unfortunately the world doesn't work this way, especially one controlled by a bunch of gangster barbarians who make up the rules as they go along.

I wish all the luck to the Syrian working class and hope they are spared the largesse of the Western left's 'advice' on the subject of revolution, they have enough to contend without our 'assistance'. Given as how we have failed to put even a tiny dent in the bastion of Capital, by what right do we hand out 'advice' to those actually engaged in the struggle?

What strikes me about the SWP article is how closely it resembles some kind of automatic writing, as if all the right mèmes have been plugged into it. On the surface it has the appearance of revolutionary writing but closer reading reveals a paucity of actual thinking on the subject of Syria. Instead Syria becomes a pawn in the SWP's game of pretend revolution, made by people who probably wouldn't recognize a revolution even if it ran right over them.

That in the UK the SWP is the largest party on the 'left' is in itself a token of the sorry state of affairs here. There has to be a better way of making change than living off other peoples' revolutions as an excuse for not having one of our own.

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