

Syrian Endgame: The Battle for Aleppo and 'Plan C'

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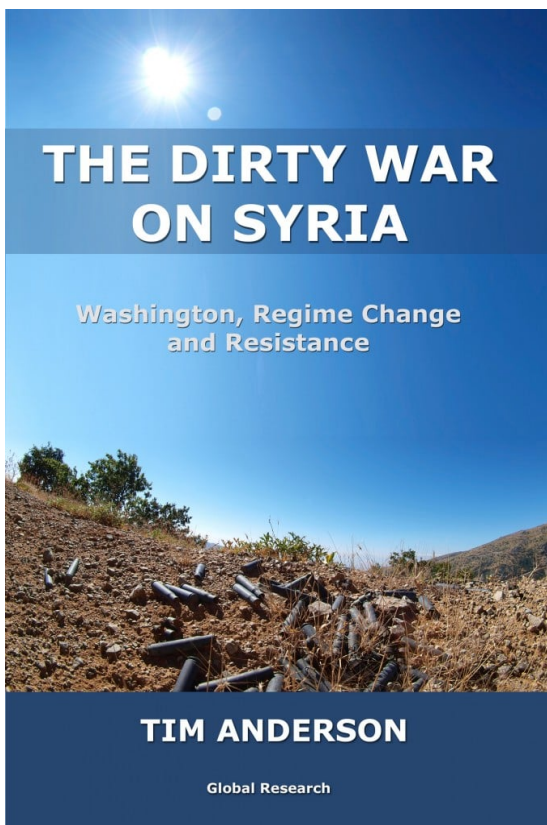
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The battle for Aleppo has forced the al Qaeda groups into their desperate last stand, as the Washington-driven proxy war on Syria moves into its final stages. The liberation of Aleppo will be the beginning of the end.

The online maps have been misleading. Even before the Russian air power intervention of September 2015 the Syrian Government controlled 85% of the country's populated areas. But reclaiming all of Aleppo is critical for Syrian control of the north and of supply lines to the shrinking ground of ISIS in the east.

Syria's major problem has been Turkey's semi-open support for jihadist armies crossing the 800km northern frontier, and the Turkey-Saudi-Qatari backed advances of ISIS from the east. In the past 10 months the Syrian Alliance has successfully pushed back on both fronts. Further, since last month, Turkey is in disarray, with its own problems.

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Many follow the logic of dominant forces but, to understand the endgame in this war, the

logic of resistance is no less important. Syria is proving that independent peoples who unite and resist can end up with a greater say in the outcome.

Washington's war on Syria began with sectarian proxy armies sent in to topple the government in Damascus. The western media continues to speak of 'moderate rebels', but the evidence is clear that the US and its allies have backed every single armed group in Syria, including the western group led by the group formerly known as Jabhat al Nusra (now rebadged as 'Jabhat Fatah al-Sham', in a futile attempt to avoid Syrian-Russian bombing), and the eastern group DAESH-ISIS. They all share a similar vicious, sectarian ideology.

Despite all the bloodshed and rhetoric, **Plan A's** aggression failed.

'Plan B' then aimed at partition of the country using, in part, what the US saw as its 'Kurdish card'.

Never mind that any such partition is against the terms of UN Security Council resolution 2254, which reaffirms the UN's 'strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic'. The US ignores such niceties.

Nevertheless, Plan B is failing due to the coherence of Syria's communities, their support for the Syrian Army, and strong regional solidarity, particularly from Iran, Russia, Hezbollah and the nationalist Palestinian militia.

Even Syria's Kurdish militia have been coordinating with and relying on the Syrian Arab Army. Whatever Syria's Kurds want, if put to a vote, Syrians would not support a federalisation which would weaken the country against its enemies.

Plan C

'Plan C' may be where forces better converge. Washington's 'rogue state' is a very bad loser. It took Washington seven years to withdraw from Vietnam, after it knew it was losing. However Syria has a master diplomat, in the form of the Russian President, willing and able to cloak a North American retreat with 'dignity'.

President Putin gave President Obama a way out, once before, back in September 2013, over the fake chemical weapons stunt, carried out by Jabhat al Nusra and its partners (see Anderson 2016, Chapter Nine). The dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile (held as a deterrent against Israel) prevented a US 'limited' missile strike on Syria.

We may well see a similar deal where Putin hails Obama's statesman like role in helping bring peace to Syria, allowing Washington to put Syria 'on the backburner', as it did with Iran last year. Of course, this will be a monstrous lie, but one that could help end the bloodshed.

Regime change in Turkey would certainly help with such a plan. But whether or not Erdogan survives the mutiny of his own armed forces, a strategic and economic tide is turning against the Turkish role in Syria. As its proxy armies lose, Ankara is trying to repair its bad relations with Russia while worsening those with Washington. Erdogan, rightly or wrongly, blames the US for backing the recent coup attempt.

Any 'Plan C', in the few months that remain for the Obama administration, would probably leave unresolved the question of the US ideological campaigns and economic sanctions

against Syria, Iran and Hezbollah, Israel's key opponents.

The experience of Washington's previous wars in Latin America and Vietnam tell us that the USA will try to keep alive its myths, its 'official history', as long as possible.

Aleppo is the final turning point in this conflict because, after the liberation of Homs, Qsayr and Palmyra, definitive reverses are destroying the morale of both the jihadists and their sponsors. Not even fanatics are keen to join in an obviously losing cause.

Since last year the sectarian groups have been steadily ground down in rural Damascus. The capital, with a population swollen to between 7 and 8 million people, has had very little rocketing, mortars or car bombs this year. Street life is far more relaxed. Ceasefires have 'worked' here because the remaining armed groups (in the East Ghouta and Daraya) are substantially weakened and surrounded.

Yet, while Damascus regained some sense of security, a shocking war raged on in Aleppo. As usual, the western media lied incessantly, focussing exclusively on that part of the city held by the al Qaeda groups and now including less than 200,000 people in total, including a small army of intelligence agents from the US, UK, France, Turkey and Israel, and several western NGOs such as the White Helmets.

In more recent days small groups of jihadists have been surrendering, to take advantage of a possible Presidential amnesty, while dozens of residents pass out through Syrian and Russian army controlled humanitarian corridors. Those checkpoints are run by commando units, including General Suheil al Hassan's Tiger Forces, as check points still face jihadist suicide car-bombs, as they did in Palmyra.

Typically, there have been almost no western media stories about the 1.5 million in the government held area. Over April-May many dozens of people were murdered across Aleppo as civilian areas and major hospitals were bombed by the NATO-backed 'rebels'. They were even filmed firing their 'hell cannons' while saying 'throw it on the civilians' (Anderson 2016, 9 May). Nothing of this emerged in the western corporate media.

In April-May the White Helmets claimed Russian or Syrian airstrikes had destroyed 'al Quds hospital', killing the last paediatrician in Aleppo. In fact, as Dr Nabil Antaki and the Aleppo Medical Association pointed out, that facility was not a registered hospital at all, rather a makeshift clinic in a damaged residential building in an al Nusra held area. In fact, there are dozens of paediatricians in Aleppo's main public hospitals (Antaki and Cattori 2016; Beeley 2016; Makhoul-Yatim 2016).

The mercenary gangs fired hundreds of rockets into the main part of Aleppo, gassed the Kurdish areas of the city and publicly beheaded a Palestinian boy, supposedly a spy for one of the Palestinian militia which fights alongside the SAA. Typically, the BBC gave prominence to jihadist claims that the publicly murdered 12 year old was 'a fighter' (BBC 2016). Distorted coverage to the end.

The western media, still on its war footing, ran false stories that 'all of Aleppo' was under siege, or that al Qaeda's field clinics were the 'only hospitals' in Aleppo. For example, Australian state media reported: 'Syrian city of Aleppo running out of food as regime forces surround city'. In fact, 15% of the population of Aleppo was under Syrian Army siege. At the same time the entire country of Syria is under siege by US, EU and Australian economic

sanctions (ABC Radio National 2016).

Those stories matter less as they are displaced by the more immediate video testimony of residents leaving the al Qaeda areas, only to praise the Syrian Army and curse the western backed 'moderate' head choppers (Geopolitics 2016).

The western backed jihadists are losing and the region's public mood is hardening. Syrian civil opposition leader Moustafa Kelechi (not allied to the armed groups) says the battle of Aleppo 'is a war to crush the Takfiri groups' bones' (FARS News 2016). The Iraqi government, once thought a mere puppet of the US, has repeatedly confirmed its close cooperation with the Syrian Government's struggle against terrorist groups (SANA 2016).

The regional alliance forged during this war - Syria, Iran, Russia, Iraq, Hezbollah and the nationalist Palestinian militia - will maintain a strong role in both the Syrian endgame and across the region.

Notes:

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