

Behind the Events in Syria

When U.S. imperialism engages in an attack on any government or movement, it is cowardly to be neutral and rank betrayal to stand on the same side as the imperialist octopus, which seeks to dominate the world. This has been an ABC for workers' movements through 150 years of class-conscious struggles. It is the very basis of Marxism.

It's the year 2011. A social explosion is shaking the Arab world. U.S. imperialism and all the old regimes tied to it in the region are trying desperately to manage and contain this still unfolding mass upheaval into channels that do not threaten imperialist domination of the region.

The U.S. and its collaborators are also trying to divide and undermine the two wings of the resistance — the Islamic forces and the secular nationalist forces — which together overthrew the U.S.-backed dictatorships in Egypt and Tunisia. There is now a concerted U.S. effort to turn these same political forces against two regimes in the region that have opposed U.S. domination in the past — Libya and Syria.

Both Libya and Syria have their own development problems, which are exacerbated by the general global capitalist crisis and decades of compromise imposed on them as they tried to survive in a hostile environment of unrelenting attacks — political, sometimes military and including economic sanctions.

The U.S./NATO bombing of Libya has clarified where imperialism stands regarding that country. Syria is also targeted by imperialism — because of its refusal to recognize the Zionist oc-

cupation, its assistance to Hezbollah in their struggle to end the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and its strategic alliance with Iran.

Syria's internal situation may be difficult to understand, but in this unfolding struggle clear statements of support for the Syrian government and against U.S. destabilization efforts have come from Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Hezbollah Secretary General Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon and several exiled leaders of Hamas, the Palestinian organization that was elected by the people of Gaza. These political leaders have experienced first-hand U.S. destabilization campaigns that used corporate media fabrications, externally financed opposition groups, targeted assassinations, "special operations" sabotage and well-trained Internet operatives.

On the side of the supposedly "democratic opposition" are such reactionaries as Sen. Joseph Lieberman, chair of the powerful Senate Homeland Security Committee, who called on the U.S. to bomb Syria next, after Libya. Outspoken supporters of the opposition in Syria include James Woolsey, former CIA director and adviser to Sen. John McCain's presidential campaign.

Wikileaks exposes U.S. role

An article entitled "U.S. Provides Secret Backing to Syrian Opposition" in the April 18, 2011, Washington Post described the Wikileaks report on U.S. diplomatic cables. The article summarizes what these State Department cables reveal about the secret funding of Syrian political opposition groups, including the beaming of anti-government programming into the country via satellite television.

The article describes the U.S.-funded efforts as part of a "long-standing campaign to overthrow the country's autocratic leader, Bashar al-Assad," which began under President George W. Bush and continued under President Barack Obama, even though Obama claimed to be rebuilding relations with Syria and posted an ambassador to Damascus for the first time in six years.

According to an April 2009 cable signed by the top-ranking U.S. diplomat in Damascus at the time, Syrian authorities “would undoubtedly view any U.S. funds going to illegal political groups as tantamount to supporting regime change.” The Post article describes the links between the U.S.-funded opposition Barada TV and the role of Malik al-Abdeh, who is on its board and distributes videos and protest updates. Malik Al-Abdeh is also on the board of the Movement for Justice and Development which his brother, Anas Al-Abdeh, chairs. The secret cables “report persistent fears among U.S. diplomats that Syrian state security agents had uncovered the money trail from Washington.”

Role of Al-Jazeera

Perhaps the most revealing challenge to and exposé of the destabilization campaign in Syria came with the resignation of Ghassan Ben Jeddo, the best-known journalist with Al-Jazeera’s television news programs and chief of its Beirut bureau. Ben Jeddo resigned in protest of Al-Jazeera’s biased coverage, especially noting a “smear campaign against the Syrian government” that has turned Al-Jazeera into a “propaganda outlet.”

Al-Jazeera favorably covered the unstoppable mass upsurge of millions in Egypt and Tunisia. However, this satellite news channel has also extensively reported every claim and political charge, regardless of how unsubstantiated, made by the political opposition in both Syria and Libya. It called for U.S. “humanitarian” intervention, no-fly zones and the bombing of Libya. It is important to understand Al-Jazeera’s position as a news corporation, especially when it claims to speak for the oppressed.

Al-Jazeera, which is based in Qatar, never reports that 94 percent of the workforce in Qatar is made up of immigrants who have absolutely no rights at all and exist in conditions of near slavery. Al-Jazeera gives little coverage to the brutal repression of the mass movement in the absolute monarchy of Bahrain, which is just next door to Qatar and is now occupied by Saudi troops.

Is this censorship because Al-Jazeera TV News is funded by the absolute monarch of Qatar, the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani? Al-Jazeera never mentions the huge U.S. Central Command military air base right there in Qatar. Drones on secret missions throughout the region regularly take off from this base. Qatar has also sent planes to participate in the U.S./NATO bombing of Libya, and it works closely with the U.S. State Department in supporting U.S. intervention in the area.

The CIA and the National Endowment for Democracy have become expert at utilizing a barrage of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to overwhelm targeted governments with millions of fabricated messages, wild rumors and images.

Facebook and counterrevolution

Fabricated alerts about struggles and splits among rival factions in Syria's military leading to resignations turned out to be false. For example, Major Gen. al-Rifai (Ret.) denied as baseless news broadcasts over satellite television that he was leading a split in the military. He added that he had retired 10 years ago.

Izzat al-Rashek of the Hamas Politburo and Ali Baraka, Hamas representative in Lebanon, denied published claims that the leadership of this Palestinian resistance organization was relocating to Qatar from Damascus. Ali Baraka explained that this was a U.S. fabrication to pressure Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah and obstruct Palestinian reconciliation while raising conflict between resistance movements and Syria.

The Syrian government has charged that snipers fired into demonstrations, shooting army and police in an effort to have police open fire on demonstrators.

Rumors, anonymous Internet postings and satellite television reports aimed at heightening sectarian differences are part of the destabilization campaign.

Dual character of Syria

It is not difficult to see why U.S. imperialism and its pawns in the region, including Israel and the corrupt dependent monarchies of Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, would want to see “regime change” in Syria.

Syria is one of the few Arab states that have no relations with Israel. Several Palestinian resistance organizations have offices-in-exile in Syria, including Hamas. Syria is allied closely with Iran and with the Hezbollah organization in Lebanon.

Syria today is not socialist nor a revolutionary country. Capitalism with its resulting inequality has not been overturned. There is a capitalist class in Syria. Many within it have benefited from “reforms” that sold formerly state-owned industries to private capital. Thus, the Syrian state represents contradictory forces.

Years of U.S. sanctions and past destabilization efforts have also had a cumulative effect. The state apparatus, ever fearful of continuing outside intervention, has become fearful of change.

Impact of Iraq war

The massive U.S. invasion and destruction of neighboring Iraq, the Bush-Blair discussion of a similar attack on Syria in 2003, and the harsh new sanctions on Syria have added intense pressure.

But the most dislocating factor is never discussed in the corporate media: To escape the last eight years of U.S. occupation, more than 1.5 million Iraqis have flooded into Syria, whose population in 2006 was 18 million. According to a 2007 report by the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, this influx impacted all facets of life in Syria, particularly the services offered by the state to all citizens and refugees.

The unexpected arrival of these Iraqi refugees has strained Syria's infrastructure, including guaranteed free elementary and high schools, free health care, housing availability and other areas of the economy and has increased costs across the board. The prices of foodstuffs and basic goods have gone up by 30 percent,

property prices by 40 percent and housing rentals by 150 percent.

Iraqi refugees also benefited from Syrian state subsidies in gasoline, food, water and other essential goods provided to everyone. Such a large mass of unemployed people led to the lowering of wages and increased competition for jobs. The impact of the global economic downturn during this difficult period added to the problems. (Middle East Institute, Dec. 20, 2010, report on Refugee Cooperation)

In its recent public statements, the Syrian government has recognized the importance of making internal reforms while maintaining national unity in an extremely diverse country that has historic differences in religion, tribes and regions and now contains almost 2 million refugees.

The diverse nationalities, religions and cultural groupings in Syria have every right to be part of this process. But what they need most is an end to constant, unrelenting U.S. intervention. U.S. hands off!

Published May 5, 2011



Chicago, May 20, 2012.

WW PHOTO: ABAYOMI AZIKIWE