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Syria and the S-300s: Re-Centering the People in the Global Struggles for Power



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“The corporate grip on opinion in the United States is one of the wonders of the Western world [...] No First World country has ever managed to eliminate so entirely from its media all objectivity, much less dissent.”

– Gore Vidal

One of the most amusing elements of the current anti-Russian hysteria produced by U.S. state/corporate propagandists is the notion that Russia is this bold, aggressive challenger to “U.S. and Western interests” when the reality has always been the opposite.

In the tumultuous period after the Soviet Union disintegrated, the Russian Federation emerged as the dominant power under the leadership of the clownish Boris Yeltsin.

The Russian capitalist oligarchy that developed during that period and expanded under the leadership of Vladimir Putin has always just wanted to be part of the global capitalist game. They had demonstrated on more than one occasion their willingness to cooperate with the agenda of Western powers. However, they wanted to be respected with their regional interests recognized.

But as a result of greed, hubris and just plain incompetence, U.S. policy-makers, especially the amateurs running foreign policy during the Obama years, pushed the Russians out of their preferred zone of caution in international affairs, with Syria being exhibit A. Forcing the Russians' hand in Syria was followed by the Ukraine when the U.S. sparked a coup in that nation as the second front against Russian "intervention" in Syria.

So it was quite comical to see how the announcement that Russia will deliver the S-300 air defense system to the Syrian government was met [with feigned horror by U.S. and NATO forces](#). This decision was taken after the U.S. allowed or didn't stop the Israeli Air Force from playing games that resulted in a Russia cargo plane being shot out of the air by Syrian ground defenses who mistook the Russia plane for an Israeli aircraft.

Without an adequate air defense system capable of covering the entire nation and strategic territories within Syria, the Israeli Air Force has had almost unimpeded access to Syria air space during the Syrian war to attack military forces associated with the Syrian government, Hezbollah and the Iranian state.

Yet in their zeal to push out anti-Russian propaganda, the state/corporate propagandists in the U.S. exposed once again Russia's conservatism and acquiescence to the global colonial U.S./EU/NATO agenda. While the headlines screamed traitor at Turkish President Erdogan for concluding a deal for the Russian S-400, the most advanced system the Russians are selling on the open market, very few seemed to have noticed that those wily, evil Russians that were propping up their partner in Syria hadn't even delivered on the S-300 sale to the Syrian state that had been concluded five years ago!

The Russians said that they failed to deliver the system that the Syrians purchased due to a request from the Israeli government in 2013. This decision took place a year after the debacle of Geneva I, the United Nations sponsored conference to resolve the Syrian War, where the Russians appeared ready to abandon Assad as long as the Syrian state was maintained, and their interests protected. Getting rid of Assad but maintaining the Syrian state was also [U.S. policy at the time](#).

However, instead of a negotiated settlement in which the Russians would play a role, the Obama administration rejected Geneva I believing that it could topple the government in Syria through its jihadist proxies. The U.S. knew that those elements were never going to be allowed to govern the entire nation but that was the point. The Syrian state was slated to be balkanized with its territory divided and a permanent presence by the U.S. directly on the ground. Those forces in Syria would be bolstered by the thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq that had been reintroduced as a result of the U.S. reinvasion supposedly to fight ISIS – that it helped to create.

Although the Russian position on Assad came out just a year after the Chinese and Russians gave the green light to the U.S. and NATO to launch a vicious war on Libya is old news, it points out how in the global game of power relations the peoples of the former colonial world continue to lose. The Russians, like the Chinese, have demonstrated repeatedly their willingness to collaborate with the U.S. and the “Western colonialist alliance,” even as successive U.S. administrations have singled them out, along with Iran and Venezuela, as [geostrategic threats to U.S. global hegemony](#).

This observation is not meant to be another Russia and China bashing that plays into the hands of the reactionaries driving U.S. policies who see military conflict with those two nations as inevitable. Instead what is being argued here is the absolute necessity for African/Black people and oppressed peoples and nations to be clear about the international correlation and balance of forces and competing interests at play so that “we” the people are not confused regarding our objective interests.

Russian intervention in Syria was not as cynical as the [U.S. and Western European powers, which knew](#) from the beginning that “progressive” forces in Syria could not win a military conflict. Nevertheless, they encouraged those forces to engage in military opposition while the U.S. and its allies decided to back various Islamist forces – not for democratic change – but to destroy the Syrian state.

Maintaining an independent, critical perspective on the national and global dispensation of social forces means not having any illusions about the world and the national, class and racial politics in play. We need to be clear that supporting Syria’s attempt to assert full sovereignty over its territory was only a secondary concern for the Russians. The back seat given to the Syrian government in the negotiations between Russia, Iran, and Turkey regarding Idlib confirms that. Protecting Russian interests in Syria and the Mid-East was and is the driving force for Russian military and diplomatic activity, nothing else!

The delivery of the S-300 anti-aircraft system to Syria resembles the Russia cooperation with the U.S., Israel and Turkey on the Turkish [Afrin operation](#), which was basically an invasion of Syria by Turkey in order to [establish a “buffer zone”](#). These are all decisions based on the objective interests of Russia and secondarily the interests of the Syrian government.

It remains to be seen how the deployment of the S-300's will alter the situation on the ground in Syria. It would not be surprising if the deployment was limited and only covered the territory around Latakia, the site of the Russian air base and close to its warm-water port. It may not be in Russia's interests to allow the Syria government the means to block Israeli intrusions into Syrian air space. If the Syrian government had the ability to really ensure the security of its national territory from Israeli intrusions, it could mean that Russia would have less leverage over the Syrian government to force a withdrawal of Iranian forces from Syria. Additionally, the land corridor and security of the [“Islamic pipeline”](#) between Iran, Iraq and Syria could be secured that may not be necessarily conducive for maintaining Russia's share of the energy market in Europe.

The U.S. and Israel overplayed their cards and made a strategic blunder by precipitating the shooting down of the Russian cargo plane. Although National Security Adviser John Bolton claims that the decision to supply Syrian forces with the S-300 is a “significant escalation,” the escalation really took place in 2012 when the Obama administration decided to allow U.S. vassal states to significantly increase military support for radical Islamic forces. [Michael Flynn revealed this as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency](#)— something the Obama forces never forgot.

Syria has been a difficult object lesson for the left that has had a devastating consequence for the people of that embattled nation. Hundreds of thousands have died, and millions have been displaced primarily because left and progressive forces lacked the organizational, but more importantly, the ideological, political, and moral clarity to mount an opposition to the machinations of their national bourgeoisie in Europe and the U.S. The very idea that the bourgeois leadership of their respective states might have some benevolent justifications for military intervention in Syria revealed a dangerous nationalist sentimentality that is driving the left version of white supremacist national chauvinism.

Before the dramatic rightist turn of the left in the U.S. and Europe over the last two decades, the left – at least much of the Marxist-Leninist left – opposed Western imperialist intervention out of a theoretical and principled commitment to the national-colonial question in the global South. As citizens in “oppressor nations,” opposing their own

bourgeoisie's interventions into oppressed nations was seen as a responsibility for the left and indeed was a measurement of what was actually an authentic left position.

That stance has virtually disappeared.

The first response by the Western left to plans or actual interventions by their nation's ruling class is a strange conversation regarding rather or not the intervention is justified or not based on the nature of the government being toppled by the intervention.

For those of us who are members of oppressed peoples and nations, it is quite obvious that without independent organizations and global solidarity structures buttressed by the few progressive states that exist on the planet, we cannot depend on any bourgeois state to really care about our humanity or on the radical or left forces in Northern nations to put a brake on repression and intervention against non-Europe states and peoples.

The bloodletting will continue in Syria. Candidate Trump raised some serious questions about the wisdom of U.S. policies in Syria and indicated that he might be willing to reverse U.S. involvement. But President Trump surrendered to the pressure from the foreign policy establishment and the warmongering corporate press. Instead of extricating the U.S., the administration [announced a few weeks ago](#) that the U.S. will essentially engage in an illegal and indefinite occupation in Syria.

There is [reasonable doubt that Israel and the U.S.](#) will allow the deployment of the S-300s even if the Russians followed through with the delivery. Which means the possibility of another dangerous escalation in the conflict at any moment. It also means why despite one's opinion about the nature of any government's internal situation, it is important to reaffirm and defend the principles of national sovereignty and [international law](#) in opposition to the arbitrary and illegal interventions to effect a change in government by any outside forces.

The people's movements for social justice and human rights around the world must not allow the people to be drawn into the machinations and contradictory struggles and conflicts between essentially capitalist blocs, which include the Russians and the state-capitalism of China. This is not to suggest a moral or political equalization between the emergence of capitalist Russia and China and the systematic degradation unleashed on the world by the Pan-European colonial/capitalist project that emerged in 1492 with the invasion of the "Americas." That would be a perversion of history and divert us from the primary global contradiction and target: The Western capitalist alliance and the corporate and finance oligarchy at its center.

In the competition between blocs and the real possibility of global conflict, we must be vigilant not to repeat the tragic mistake made before the first world war when workers enthusiastically signed up as cannon fodder in the clash of capitalist empires. Imperialist war really is a class issue!

Totalitarian capitalist domination is not a figment of our imaginations, it is real. Penetrating the ideological mystifications that divert us away from the matrix of power that distorts consciousness and renders the people as collaborators in their own subjection is the task of the moment.

The global order is changing, the only question is what will emerge. Will the new order be a multipolar one dominated by emerging capitalist states or will a new transitional order develop that is oriented toward an association of states and people's movements moving toward authentic de-colonization, ecological rationality, and socialist construction?

There is still time for the people to choose.