

New York Times vents Washington's rage over debacle in Syria

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The stunning military defeats suffered by US-backed “rebels” in Syria’s northern city of Aleppo since the weekend have touched off a wave of demoralized recriminations within Washington’s political establishment, the military and intelligence apparatus and the corporate media, which together instigated and defended the bloody five-and-a-half-year war for regime-change against the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Syrian troops, backed by Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon and Shia militias from Iraq, have succeeded in overrunning close to half of the eastern section of Aleppo, which the “rebels,” a collection of militias dominated by the Syrian Al Qaeda affiliate, the al-Nusra Front, had held for over four years.

The consolidation of government control over all of Aleppo, which is now almost universally recognized as inevitable, would deprive the US-backed forces of their last urban redoubt and place all of Syria’s main population centers under government control.

Among the most bitter responses to this development is a front-page article published Tuesday by the *New York Times* titled “Assad’s Prize If He Prevails: Syria in Tatters,” which grudgingly acknowledges that “President Bashar al-Assad is starting to look as if he may survive the uprising, even in the estimation of some of his staunchest opponents.”

For the *Times*, this is indeed a blow. Ever since President Barack Obama declared in 2011 that “Assad must go,” and the CIA and Pentagon, working in league with the most reactionary monarchical dictatorships in the Middle East—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE—began pouring in billions of dollars in arms and money to back jihadist mercenaries, America’s “newspaper of record” has functioned as the leading propagandist for Syrian regime-change.

Its editorial pages are overseen by James Bennet, a

figure with the closest ties to the state apparatus and the top echelons of the Democratic Party. (His father is a former head of USAID, a front for the CIA, and his brother is the senior senator from Colorado). The *Times* has churned out countless lying and hypocritical editorials and columns by such writers as Nicholas Kristof and Roger Cohen justifying the bloodbath instigated by US imperialism in Syria as a “human rights” crusade and promoting a more aggressive intervention, including a confrontation with Syria’s principal ally, Russia.

The latest front-page piece only underscores the fact that the line between editorial propaganda and news coverage in the newspaper has long since ceased to exist. The *Times* has shamelessly used its reporting to justify terrorist attacks and sectarian atrocities carried out by CIA-backed Islamists as legitimate actions by democratic revolutionaries, while demonizing Assad in the same manner employed in relation to Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi to prepare public opinion for the US wars of aggression in Iraq and Libya, both of which involved the murder of the targeted leaders.

The author of Tuesday’s article is Alissa Rubin, who served as the Baghdad bureau chief for first the *Los Angeles Times* and then the *New York Times* between 2003 and 2009, a period in which it is estimated that the illegal US invasion led to the deaths of roughly one million Iraqi men, women and children.

One would never guess from the feigned moral outrage of *Times* correspondents like Rubin over the Assad military’s use of “barrel bombs” and Russian bombing of Al Qaeda positions in populated urban areas that the same newspaper promoted a war that involved far greater crimes in Iraq as well as the US regime-change operation that unleashed the carnage in Syria.

The bulk of Rubin's article consists of quotes from well-known advocates of the Syrian regime-change intervention and its escalation, such as former US ambassadors Ryan Crocker and Robert Ford.

Crocker predicts that the fighting in Syria will "go on for years" even if the government retakes all of Aleppo. He compares it to the 15-year civil war in neighboring Lebanon, suggesting that the bloodshed in Syria is likely to continue even longer.

Ford comments that even if the government consolidates its rule over all of Syria, the country will be reduced to "a half-dead corpse... this gaping wound that stretches as far as the eye can see."

Rubin writes: "Assad's victory, if he should achieve it, may well be Pyrrhic: He would rule over an economic wasteland hampered by a low-level insurgency with no end in sight." She also predicts that the country would be starved for economic resources to rebuild what the war for regime-change has destroyed.

"The American Congress is unlikely to contribute, and neither are institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, where opponents of Mr. Assad's like the United States and Saudi Arabia have considerable influence," she writes.

No doubt these predictions dovetail with specific policy options now under consideration in the White House, the Pentagon and the CIA. Even if Assad succeeds in staving off for now the US attempt to overthrow him, every effort will be made to continue bleeding the country white.

Behind the unconcealed anger and vindictive tone of Rubin's piece lies the knowledge that the propaganda campaign waged by the *Times* to promote the imperialist intervention in Syria with hypocritical rhetoric about "human rights" and "democracy" has proven a failure. This same sentiment is undoubtedly shared by a whole section of the pseudo-left, tendencies such as the International Socialist Organization and others, whose arguments in support of the war for regime-change were virtually indistinguishable from the line dictated by the CIA to the *Times* editorial board.

The demoralization among these layers is deepened by the pending ascension to the presidency of Donald Trump, who has called into question the arming of Islamist "rebels" and suggested his administration would seek closer cooperation with Russia in

suppressing ISIS and Al Qaeda in Syria.

Anyone interpreting Trump's remarks as a harbinger of a new era of peace in the Middle East or anywhere else on the planet, however, will be in for rude shocks, sooner rather than later. The objective logic of the protracted crisis of American capitalism as well as Trump's own "America First" policy leads to an explosive escalation of US militarism.

Whatever the billionaire con man's semi-coherent comments on Syria, he has surrounded himself with right-wing warmongers who are determined to continue war throughout the region, including against both Iran and Russia. Moreover, he has already laid out plans for a major expansion of the US Army and Navy as well as Washington's nuclear arsenal.

Should the incoming administration change the rhetoric justifying such an escalation from the "human rights" and "democracy" tropes of the Obama years back to the "global war on terror," or just the naked defense of US interests, the *Times* can be counted on to make the necessary adjustments to its journalistic propaganda.

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