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More than
half the
world's
poor are
children



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Other than the editorial, the opinions in the articles inside are not necessarily those of Liberation.



Congolese boy

More than half of the world's poor are children; and the cumulative effects of poverty, especially in early childhood, can cause nutritional deficiencies and health problems that can reduce a child's capacity to later sustain a normal life and cope with difficulties.

Poor children are more likely to die from pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, measles and HIV/AIDS, which together with malnutrition are responsible for more than half of the deaths of children under 5 globally.

Strategies adopted to reduce child mortality in developing countries are usually focused on interventions addressing biological causes, without considering its key underlying determinants. There is a growing consensus that to reduce health inequalities, especially during childhood, it is necessary to design interventions which also address social de-

terminants of health.

What are the Bolsa Familia and the Family Health Program?

Conditional cash transfers (CCT's) are poverty-reduction interventions that were first implemented in the 1990's in Latin America. Through CCT programs, money is transferred from government to poor households with the requirement that parents comply with specific conditions focused on improving health and education for their children.

The transfer of money aims to alleviate the immediate burden of poverty, and the condition attached to it aims to encourage the use of health and education services. CCT programmes have become a common strategy for alleviation of poverty and reduction of inequalities in some low and middle-income countries.

In Brazil, the **Bolsa Familia Program (BFP)** was launched in 2003 and merged pre-existing

social programs into one unique expanded program. The BFP is the world's largest CCT program, with a total of 13.9 million families enrolled in 2012. The coverage of BFP has expanded greatly in the past 10 years, and now reaches all Brazilian municipalities. A family beneficiary of the BFP receives a monthly money allowance by complying with specific conditions related to the health and education of their children. The amount each family receives depends on the income and composition of the family.

To meet the conditions related to health children younger than 7 years must be fully vaccinated according to the Brazilian immunization program schedule, and they must comply with routine health check-ups and growth monitoring. The frequency of such health check-ups and growth monitoring depends on the child's age and is based on the guidelines of the Ministry of Health.

Pregnant and lactating women must attend scheduled prenatal and postnatal visits. Moreover they have to attend health and nutritional educational activities. If the family is within its catchment area, health-related conditions should be met using the facilities of the main primary health care program in Brazil, the Family Health Program.

The **Programa Saúde da Família (The Family Health Program, FHP)** is another large-scale national program, implemented in Brazil over recent years. By 2012 the FHP reached almost all Brazilian municipalities, covering 54.8% of the

population. By offering free community-based health care FHP has broadened people's access to primary health care, especially in deprived and rural areas.

The study assessed the effect of the BFP on under-5 mortality rates in Brazil; in particular for causes of mortality associated with poverty (such as malnutrition and diarrhoea), and some intermediate mechanisms (such as vaccination, prenatal care, and admission to hospital), that could explain the effect of the intervention. We also analysed the impact of the FHP and its joint effect with the BFP.

What is the effect of these two interventions on child mortality?

It was found that both BFP and FHP coverage were associated with a significant reduction of under-5 mortality rates: the **Bolsa Familia (BFP)** effect was greater when the program had a high coverage (>32%) of the total population in a municipality, and all poor eligible population was enrolled and remained in the programme for 4 years or more.

The **Family Health Programme (FHP)** effect was strongest when the programme had high rates of coverage of the population of the municipality (>70%) for 4 years or more.

The strongest impact of the BFP was on reducing under-5 mortality resulting from malnutrition and diarrheic, whereas FHP was associated reduction in diarrhoea diseases and in infections of the lower respiratory tract.



Afghan Girl

Turkey and Iraqi Kurds meet to resume peace talks

Middle East Online reports



Erdogan and Barzani meet for peace

DIYARBAKIR - Turkey's prime minister welcomed the leader of Iraq's autonomous north to his country's own Kurdish-dominated territory for the first time Saturday, in a visit designed to kickstart a stalled peace process.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip

Erdogan greeted Iraqi Kurdish leader Massud Barzani in the Kurds' heartland of Diyarbakir, southeast Turkey, ahead of a series of joint engagements including officiating at a mass wedding.

Barzani has visited the capital of Ankara many times but Saturday's meeting was described by Erdogan as "historic" and a "crowning moment" in overcoming a decades-old conflict with the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Ankara hopes to use Barzani's influence as a respected figure among Turkey's Kurds to bring them back to the negotiating table.

"If Barzani has any importance in the eyes of our citizens, that importance will make its contribution," Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said on Friday.

Progress has stalled following a ceasefire called by jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in March. His fighters suspended a promised withdrawal from Turkish soil in September, accusing Ankara of failing to keep to the terms of the bargain in giving greater rights.

The Turkish army reported on Friday that one of its convoys had been attacked, allegedly by PKK rebels, for the first time in months in southeastern Nusaybin district on the Syrian border.

Thousands of rebels remain

holed up in the autonomous north of Iraq, an area under Barzani's control, using the region as a springboard for attacks on Turkish targets as part of their campaign for self-rule in southeastern Turkey.

But Barzani said that Kurds should use non-violent means to gain the homeland they believe they deserve.

"Having our own state is the natural right of the Kurdish people, but that cannot be achieved through violence," he said.

Turkey's "Kurdish question" has been in a thorn in Ankara's side since the modern republic was founded in 1923 with a constitution that failed to recognise its Kurdish population as a separate minority.

The Kurds, a distinct Sunni Muslim people, make up an estimated 20 percent of Turkey's population or around 15 million people, but are also scattered across Iraq, Iran and Syria.

Some 45,000 people have been killed in the conflict since the PKK took up arms in 1984.

Certain prominent Kurds criticised Barzani's visit as an opportunistic gesture ahead of municipal elections in March 2014.

"Barzani's participation in the kick-off of the prime minister's campaign is highly suggestive," said the leader of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in Diyarbakir, Mehmet Emin Yilmaz.

Others contend that the visit is not an empty symbol, such as respected Kurdish parliamentary deputy Leyla Zana who said the talks were motivated by "hope".

Erdogan's Law and Justice Party (AKP) passed a package of reforms in September designed to give Kurds and other groups extra rights, but these fell short of expectations by failing, for example, to grant

them any constitutional recognition.

Barzani's visit also follows the announcement Tuesday by the powerful Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) of a new transitional authority in Syrian Kurdistan.

Like Turkey, Barzani's government has not made secret its concerns over the PYD move towards temporary rule in northern Syria, after the victory of Kurdish forces over jihadist groups in Syria.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul on Friday warned the move risked "the breakup of Syria".

Kurdish regions of Syria have been administered by local Kurdish councils since forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad withdrew in the middle of 2012.

The redeployment was seen as a tactical move by Damascus to free up forces to battle rebels elsewhere and encourage Syrian Kurds to avoid allying with the opposition.

Erdogan is also likely to discuss the terms of an energy partnership with Barzani, a project that could aggravate tensions in the troubled region.

Any energy deal threatens to worsen a long-running dispute between Baghdad and the autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq over the exploitation of the country's energy wealth, though Turkey has offered to act as a mediator in a gesture designed to pacify the Iraqis.

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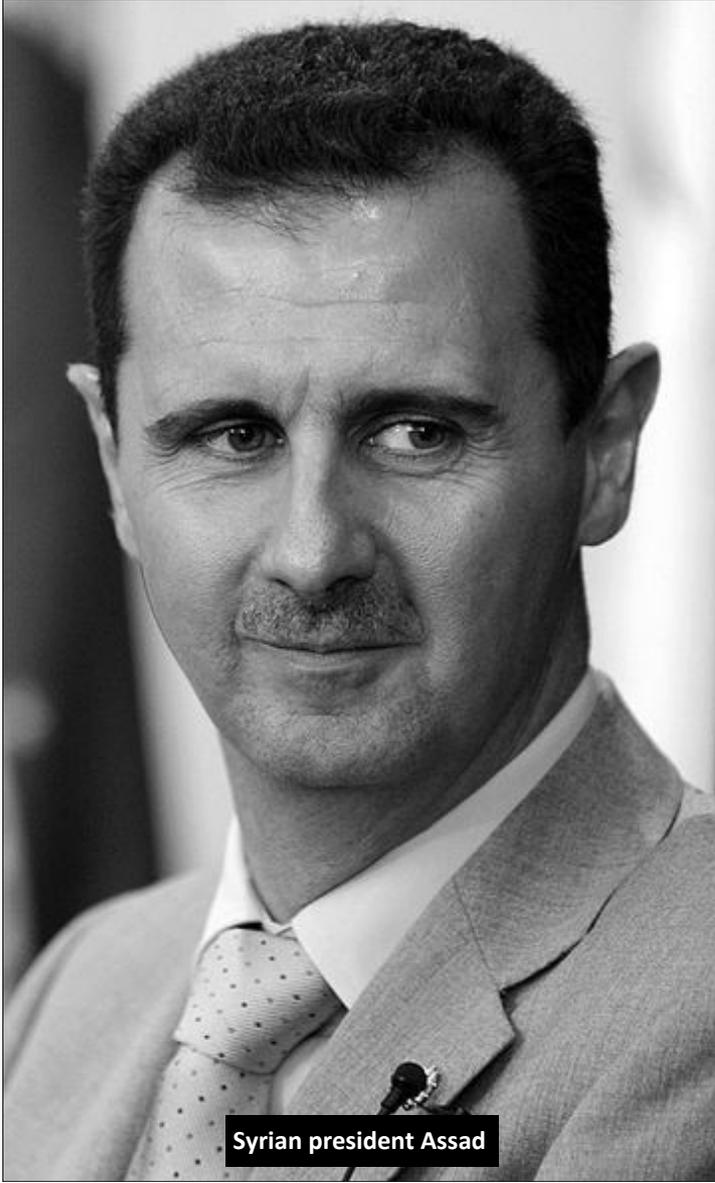
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Tracks of Syrian chemical terrorists in Turkey

Doğan Ergün, Özgür Savaşçioğlu and Yiğit Günay report



Syrian president Assad

In May 2013 in Adana, chemical substances used for sarin production seized during the operation of Turkish police against the members of Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front. Heysam Kassab, a critical figure arrested during the operation, declared the prosecution office that he was a member of “Liwa Al-Islam”, a chemical attack group suspected to be behind the attack took place in Damascus on August 21.

The report by public prosecutor’s Office of Adana reveals that Heysam Kassab, born in Homs in Syria, built a large network in Turkey in order to get the substances required for chemical weapon production.

According to the report, some figures linked with public security offices of Turkish State involve in illegal activities and serves for the network as well.

Cooperation with a large transportation company

Having been requested chemical substances; Heysam Kassab made contact with Raif Ay, owner of CEM AY Nakliyat, one of the biggest transportation companies in Hatay, and asked him to provide the list of chemical substances.

Having understood that Raif Ay’s cousin B.A. was working as an assistant at Çukurova University, Chemistry Department, Kassab gave B.A. the list of substances. However only

four of six chemical substances could be purchased on the market while the remaining two substances were sold legal entities by the permission of Turkish Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation (MKE). The list of substances included lethal white phosphorus (P4), use of which is codified as a war crime.

Although B.A. told Raif Ay that Kassab was a suspicious man, according to telephone records on the report, B.A. continued helping Kassab to provide the substances, trade of which was illegal. Calling the news office of soL, Raif Ay claimed that he decided to stop communicating with Kassab after he learned that the substances he had demanded could not be purchased legally on the market without permission.

Government invites Raif Ay to the security meeting

Raif Ay was among the participants who were invited to the security meeting of the government, organized after the attack in Reyhanlı on 11 May 2013. He told nothing on Kassab during the go-vernment meeting, but continued to cooperate with him.

Religious community leader contact

Kassab contacted with Raif Ay through a religious community leader, Nasir Erdoğan. Kassab was living in Erdoğan’s house. According to telephone records, Raif Ay called Nasir Erdoğan “Sheikh”. Raif Ay knew Nasir Erdoğan as Sheikh Abu Umeyr. During a telephone interview with news office of soL, Raif Ay claimed that he called Nasir Erdoğan

sheikh because “scholars are called sheikh in the region”.

Same organization attacked Damascus?

Kassab told he was a member of Liwa Al-Islam organization. Zahran Alloush, who has close relations with Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, head of Saudi Secret Service, leads this organization. After the attack on 21 August, Lebanese newspaper As-Safir reported that the region fired with chemical weapon missiles was under the control of Liwa Al-Islam during the attack. Russian Secret Service also confirmed this information. Liwa Al-Islam was the organization that “allowed” UN team to make investigation in the region.

Youtube videos took on 21 August and a video on the cell phone of one of the three militants killed by the fighters of Kurdistan Regional Government are the most important evidences that reveal Liwa Al-Islam was suspicious. The operation is called “Cold Wind Operation” by a militant on a video, on which banner of Liwa Al-Islam on weapons is visible, while the members of the organization wear gas masks.

The videos broadcasted on soL Portal, the website of soL Newspaper. Please click the link to see the news and videos:

<http://haber.sol.org.tr/dunyadan/kimyasal-saldiri-liva-el-islamini-isi-mi-haberi-79775>

Doğan Ergün/Özgür Savaşçioğlu/Yiğit Günay – soL

Translated by Kerem Cantekin/International Network for Justice

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Syrian army

**The State We
Need.
Keys to the
Renaissance
of Britain by
Michael
Meacher MP
Biteback
Publishing.
ISBN 978184
9545884
James
Grayson
reviews**

The author is a veteran Labour MP who has represented Oldham in the House of Commons for more than forty years. Unlike many of his colleagues he both offers an analysis and suggests policies. Can he attract widespread support? He has held office in Health

and Social Security and was Secretary of State for the Environment. He has considerable experience to draw upon: he has also stood for the leadership and the deputy leadership of the party.

A problem for the world in general as well as this country is the depletion of resources more quickly than we discover more, so the replacement rate deteriorates whilst some countries rapidly industrialise. People expect higher standards of living whilst the distribution of resources within societies is increasingly unequal. There are major problems to be resolved! How does he help us to consider them?

Michael Meacher offers figures to support his arguments; at times the book reminds one of the Economist publications, *Pocket World in Figures*. A glossary would have been handy for the agglomerations of initials, many are amplified within the index.

The prescriptions are about: enforceable regulation and international co-operation, better educational perfor-

mance, global warming, climate destruction, greed, mega-corporations and so on. A strategy for Britain's renaissance is offered, the final section deals with a wider perspective which encompasses the Global Architecture of National Interest Capitalism and the Environment From Uncontrolled Markets to Green Economy.

We share the diagnosis to a greater or lesser degree but the replacements for current capitalism have yet to attract international support, without which our aspirations for a fairer society whether domestic or international are unlikely to be met. Meacher offers facts to support arguments, he offers reflections on some of the previous experiments which he was involved in.

It would be unfair to suggest that the book merely fizzles with ideas. Perhaps it also offers a fertile trench to harvest? The author is developing a parallel interest as a commentator. His blog www.michaelmeacher.info is interesting and regular. The

book offers a range of ideas to refresh one's commitment to a more progressive society.

The author remains optimistic. "The belief that, while the market has its proper place, the fundamental principles underpinning society should be equity, social justice, equality of opportunity and democratic accountability is a rallying cry that evokes a universal response. It is a fundamental change of direction which once launched knows no bounds."

Political optimism needs to be turned into policies; several are offered but more importantly delivery mechanisms as well. The ideas or some of them at least, need to be incorporated into praxis. An interesting, perhaps inspirational read for the new year and copies are available from the author at a heavily discounted price of £10.

Recently New Society has become interested in developing some of the ideas, especially those on sustainability. {NB the rash of capitals in the 4th para relates to sub-headings within the book.}



Moroccan army

mainly in Algeria. The Moroccan regime is repressive; it is illegal to criticise it and people suddenly vanish. The military part of the Saharawi struggle became the POLISARIO which fought for 18 years.

In 2010 the United Nations brokered a peace plan which called for a referendum to decide upon Saharawi self-determination from Morocco. This has yet to take place because of obstruction by Morocco, as time passes more and more Moroccans can claim to be eligible to participate.

There are large potash deposits in the Western Sahara. Morocco is thought to have about 100,000 men defending its sand wall. Perhaps the matter will eventually be resolved by recourse to affordability? The EU no longer imports Saharawi fish and the USA has paused its development.

What are the views of the Moroccan citizenry in a country where the best roads are in the desert to support the wall and citizens would like a more proportionate use of development resources?

<http://sonsofthecloudstheastcolony.com>



James Grayson Reviews

**SONS OF THE CLOUDS:
THE LAST COLONY**

Given that there is now a country: Southern Sudan so the outstanding African conflict is in the Western Sahara. This film: puts human faces to the conflict, exposes the cynicism of politicians, exposes the basis of national interests and offers a context for what has become known as the Arab spring. The

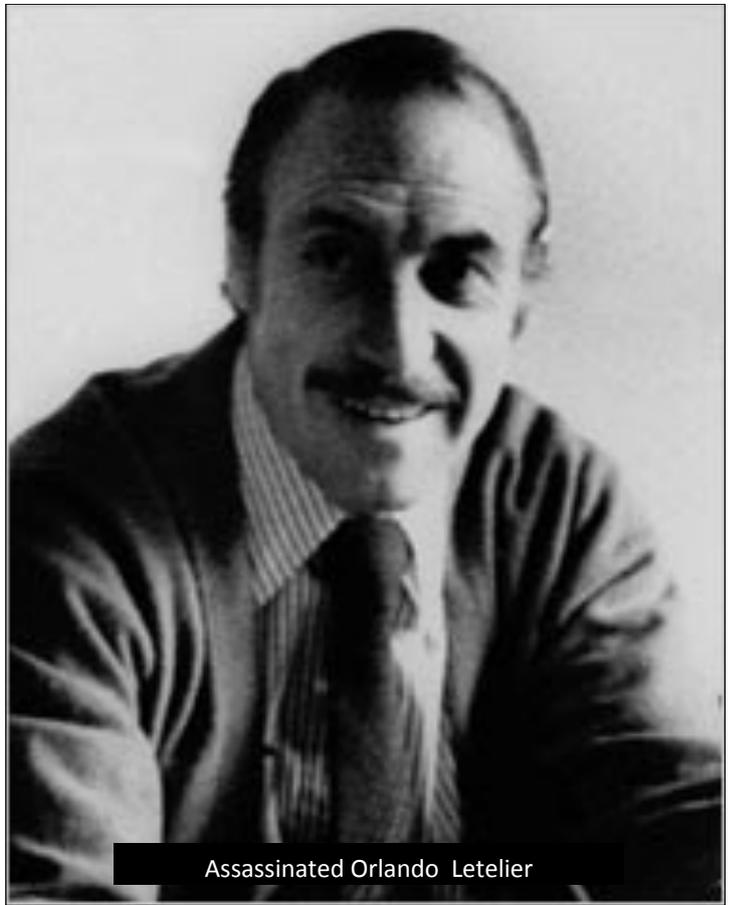
British premier was in early October.

Should you need reminding Spain pulled out of Western Sahara in 1975 and King Hassan II marched in; not with the army, instead he encouraged large numbers of Moroccans to go on the Green March.

Subsequently an enormous wall was built and about 200,000 people live in camps,



Bombing of La Moneda by Pinochet's Junta



Assassinated Orlando Letelier

**A History of
Struggle
Commemorating
the Fiftieth
Anniversary of
Liberation;
formerly the
Movement for
Colonial
Freedom.
Stan Newens £3**

What this means is that both within and outside the New Majority those arguing for reforms are in the lead. Within the New Majority the victories of the more left-leaning candidates will force conservatives on the defensive, increasing the possibilities for reforms to succeed. Within the right, the strengthening of the RN means there is some possibility that a deal can be cut between the New Majority and the RN to push through some form of reforms to the constitution, although this would necessarily be less far-reaching than many on the left want to see. However, even if they only manage to reform the elec-

toral system they will have managed to fundamentally change the face of Chilean politics, and opened the road for further changes down the road.

What is clear is that the New Majority government of Michelle Bachelet will not be implementing any revolutionary changes, but then that was not really the proposal. For the left, the New Majority was always about providing institutional power to complement the social mobilisation for change. It is about laying the basis for more democratic and

socialist-leaning reforms in the future. It is about destroying the Pinochet legacy, and these elections have shown that the people of Chile have taken a long step in that direction - although how long a step it will be, will be determined by the continuing social mobilisation for change and the power dynamics within the New Majority and within the Chilean right.

Victor Figueroa Clark, author of 'Salvador Allende, Revolutionary Democrat', was one of over 50 speakers at the Latin America Conference 2013 on December 7th.



Salvadore Allende

The 11 September 1973 **overthrown by the armed Chilean coup d'état was a watershed event in both the Cold War and the history of Chile. Following an extended period of social and political unrest between the conservative-dominated Congress of Chile and the socialist President Salvador Allende, as well as economic warfare ordered by U.S. President Richard Nixon, Allende was** **forces and national police. During the air raids and ground attacks that preceded the coup, Allende gave his last speech, in which he vowed to stay in the presidential palace, denouncing offers for safe passage should he choose exile over confrontation. Direct witnesses accounts of his death agree that he committed suicide in the palace**

Saudi women activists convicted

Memri reports on their struggle for human rights



Wajeha Al-Huweidar-Women's Rights Activist

On June 15, 2013, following a year-long trial, Saudi women's rights activists Wajeha Al-Huweidar and Fawzia Al-'Uyouni were convicted of inciting a woman (Nathalie Morin, a French Canadian living in Saudi Arabia) against her husband and of trying to smuggle her and her three children out of Saudi Arabia. Al-Huweidar and Al-'Uyouni were sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment followed by a two-year ban on leaving the country. [1]

Throughout their investigation and trial, Al-Huweidar and Al-'Uyouni denied trying to kidnap Morin or to smuggle her out of the country, and claimed that they had only tried to bring food and water to Morin and her children who were imprisoned inside their house.

In a communiqué they issued following their sentencing, Al-Huweidar and Al-'Uyouni stated that they had been convicted despite the absence of any evidence against them and despite the fact that the judge had refused to question Morin throughout the six trial hearings. They promised to appeal the sentence, and added that the entire affair was a conspiracy meant to hobble them and curb their humanitarian activity. [2]

In a June 18, 2013 entry on her blog, Morin too denied that Al-Huweidar had interfered in her matter. She wrote: "The charges against Wajeha Al

Huweidar must be cleared, she has not asked to be involved in my story and she should not suffer the consequences. She never knew me and knew nothing about me. She only wanted to help me as a woman, a wife, a mother and human being herself from what she heard by others. She never tried to make any kind of interference in my relationship with my husband and she never had a discussion directly with me." [3]

On September 24, 2013, a Saudi court denied Al-Huweidar and Al-'Uyouni's appeal, and, according to them, their sentence is due to begin in a few days. They have declared that they intend to appeal to the Saudi King. [4]

In an article she published September 25 on the liberal website Member-elheraralijan.info, Al-Huweidar wrote that the sentence imposed upon her and her friend was meant to intimidate all Saudi women who work to promote women's rights, and that this sentence was part of a vast global mechanism that upholds oppression and evil while suppressing humane values like justice, peace, freedom, love, equality and the right to a dignified life.

The following are excerpts from her article. [5]

Saudi women's rights activists Wajeha Al-Huweidar

This Sentence Conveys A Message: That Any Saudi Woman Who Demands Justice

For Women Will Meet The Same, Or A Harsher, Fate

"My friend Fawzia Al-'Uyouni and I have been informed that the appellate court has upheld the unjust sentence that was imposed on us for 'inciting a wife against her husband' – [namely, a sentence of] ten months' imprisonment and a two-year ban on leaving [the kingdom]. The sentence is to be implemented within a few days. By cleverly and cruelly arranging such a conclusion [to this affair], they have conveyed a sharp message to all Saudi women, namely that any woman who demands social justice for her fellow women will meet the same fate, or perhaps even harsher measures, if necessary. But there is another question that occurs to the wise [among us]: Do those who have done this to us wish to convey this message alone, or are they part of a global mechanism of evil that wishes to bequeath an even worse legacy to mankind?

"Let's take a step back from what has happened to us, from our country and from the Gulf, and look at the peoples of the world. For long decades, in both the East and the West, we have seen evil constantly laying in wait for good and crushing it.

[We have seen] injustice violating justice and slaying it, falsehood devouring truth and tearing it limb from limb, war killing peace throwing it to the ground to gasp its last breaths, and oppression throttling creativity and freedom and even these displays of inhuman [behaviour] have grown and intensified in the last decade, especially since the tragedy of The war on terror beat its drums ever louder, and their echoes reached Iraq and Afghanistan. Then came the economic collapse that hit all the world's countries with a terrible and chronic plague of poverty. 9/11. taking pride in doing so.



Mana al-Sharif-Driving campaigner



**Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association,
Co-Founder-Mohamed al-Gahtani**

But in the last three years, since the outbreak of the deadly Arab Spring, people's situation has grown even worse. Eroding people to dust, oppressing and even killing them have become commonplace [phenomena] that nobody even notices.

"What are the strong trying to tell the weak and the future generations? What does it mean that, every day, the local and global media shows us so many innocent people being murdered in the markets, on the roads, in coffee shops, in places of worship and elsewhere, while the killers, the perpetrators of these crimes, wander the globe without being held to account? What does it mean that, in a certain part of the world, a woman is imprisoned and flogged for not wearing a hijab, while the corrupt [officials] of her country rob the state's resources and squander them?"

What does it mean that emaciated and starved children have their childhood stolen away from them and are used like tools, toiling away for long hours every day in order to earn their bread, while the rich stuff themselves [to the point of] indigestion and their pockets bulge with stolen money?

"What does it mean that governments hide the human trafficking and drug trade that exists in their [countries], yet brag about upholding the rights of their citizens? Why is it that those calling for peace are not heard, whereas military commanders receive constant media attention?"

Why do capitalists constantly

destroy the environment and trigger military conflicts in order to take over economic resources and make a profit from them?

What do the politicians of the world want us to infer when they turn to stop the bloodshed in a certain part of the world while their hands are stained with the blood of innocent women, children and elderly people? What does it mean that the 'good' and peaceful people of the world will one day be transformed into [either] killers or killed for political reasons or economic gain?

"Why have people everywhere begun to feel that evil is too vast to be conquered, that oppression must be quietly accepted and tolerated as a way of life, that bribery is [just] a tax that must be paid to the corrupt and powerful, and that it is reasonable for judges to take the side of the influential and the elite?"

"We Will Never Let You Deny Us Our Humane Values And Our Dream Of A Dignified Life!"

"How did the correct notions and values of humanity – such as justice, peace, freedom, good, love, equality, security and the right to a dignified existence – become anomalous concepts that are seldom to be found all at once in [even] one single country?"

Even in democratic countries, people have begun feeling great apprehension about the future, are afraid to feel joy in life, and fear lack and poverty?

What is it that the leaders of

the world want to convey to their peoples? That dignified life is their prerogative alone, and the prerogative of their cronies, whereas all others are destined to hell and misery? Until when will the peoples of the world, all of them, continue demonstrating in the streets and facing arrests and humiliation for demanding their legitimate rights?

All the security forces in all countries of the world have begun to look the same and to and behave the same way towards demonstrators. What are the tyrants of the world trying to tell us? That the banks have depleted their reserves of humanity, and there is no dignified life to be had, so there is no point in seeking it?

"No, we will never let you deny us our humane values and our dream of a dignified life! On my own behalf and on behalf of my friend Fawzia Al-'Uyouni, and on behalf of all the decent people and the reformists in the world, we cry out against evil and declare that we refuse to believe that the reserves of humanity are depleted – because these are reserves that can never be depleted, because truth is weightier and more solid than falsehood, because good conquers wider swathes in people's hearts than evil, because the roots of love run deep and its dominion is larger than that of hate, because peace has more fans than war, and they are more enduring than the supporters and leaders of war, and the supporters of justice are more steadfast, stubborn and have a longer reach than the supporters of oppression. Freedom, equality and democracy are the ideal paths towards a dignified life.

"You who have chosen to stand in formation at the behest of oppression, do what you will, but rest assured that you shall not be able to distance us even a little from our humane values.

For we, the people of light, grow more numerous as love [continues to] spread, and our sons and grandsons are those who will remain here, while

you, who spread corruption in the land, will undoubtedly pass away and vanish."

Endnotes:

[1] *Al-Hayat* (London), June 16, 2013. Morin is married to a Saudi named Sa'eed Al-Shahrani and has been living in the kingdom for over eight years. She has a Twitter account and a YouTube channel on which she posts videos and testimonies about her life in Saudi Arabia. In some of these posts, she wrote that she and her family were in extreme financial distress, that her husband was abusing her, and that she wished to return to Canada but the Saudi authorities had been preventing her from leaving the country with her family since 2006. See MEMRI Special Dispatch No.5338, "Saudi Women's Rights Activists Wajeha Al-Huweidar, Fawzia Al-'Uyouni Sentenced To Prison For Trying To Help Canadian Woman Living In Saudi Arabia," June 17, 2013. In July 2013, following the publication of Al-Huweidar and Al-'Uyouni's sentence, Kuwaiti liberal Ahmad Al-Saraf wrote in his column that the two deserved not punishment but a Nobel Prize. See: MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 5380, "Kuwaiti Columnist: Saudi Women's Rights Activists Wajeha Al-Huweidar And Her Comrades Deserve Nobel Prize," July 29, 2013.

[2] *Sawomenvoice.com*, June 16, 2013.

[3] *Saudireal-life.blogspot.co.il*, June 18, 2013.

[4] *Member-elheraralijan.info*, September 24, 2013.

[5] *Member-elheraralijan.info*, September 25, 2013.

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Bloody Syria war heads for its third anniversary

Kenny Coyle analyses the different forces at work



As the bloody Syrian conflict heads toward its third anniversary, it's become clearer that its impact goes far beyond the country's own borders.

Despite the global snooping by Western intelligence agencies, exposed so forcefully by Wikileaks and the heroic Edward Snowden, one of the most important lessons is that Western imperialist powers continue to base their strategies on miscalculation, arrogance and ignorance.

Authoritarian as the Syrian regime undoubtedly is, it nonetheless secured support across the sectarian and ethnic divide. It could not have survived the past three years unless this was the case far less the four decades of Assad family and Baath party rule that has preceded it. This fact appears to have eluded the Western elites.

Even now, Western mainstream media insists on portraying Damascus as a dictatorship resting on a minority sect the Alawites, ignoring the complex ethnic character of Syria and the contradictory aspects of Baathist ideology.

There are many reasons for progressives to criticize Syria's foreign policy. It has meddled in Lebanon and intrigued within the Palestinian liberation movement, it lined up with the US during the invasion of Iraq and yet Syria's insistence on

setting its policy according to its own interests, at least as interpreted by the Assad leadership, stood in the way of wider Western plans to hijack the "Arab Spring" and reshape the Middle East.

US imperialism's intentions were always to undermine Syria's independent stance on regional politics, in particular its refusal to cuddle up to Israel. The belief was that it would be relatively easy to create yet another pliable client state. This plan has been wrecked.

Syria has moved even closer to Russia and to Iran. The rise of a new Islamist insurgency has also reignited sectarian groups in neighbouring Iraq. In Baghdad and in the semi-autonomous Kurdish north there is little appetite to see a revived Al-Qaida-linked Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham help topple Assad and then return to Iraq.

In turn, the fissures within the anti-Assad alliance have reached levels that were scarcely conceivable three years ago. The spectacle of the British House of Commons rejecting a prime minister's proposal for war, the first since 1782, followed by President Obama's reluctant acceptance of Russian-led peace efforts represented a global humiliation for the US-UK alliance. Of course, these events shouldn't be over-exaggerated, the US

and British war machines remain powerful deadly forces, but they do suggest that they act within tighter restraints than perhaps had been realized. The peace and anti-imperialist movements in Britain especially, should draw strength and confidence from this.

Unquestionably, one of the key reasons for this stumbling performance by Prime Minister David Cameron was the unavoidable evidence of extreme Islamist militias the majority of which now appear to have come from outside the country. The prospect of the US and the UK sponsoring Al-Qaida linked or allied groups, despite unconvincing avowals that the weapons and cash would only go to "moderates", was a key factor in derailing Cameron's armed bandwagon as skeptical Tories defected to join Labour and other opposition MPs.

REBEL DIVISIONS

Vast amounts of cash and arms have flooded from Saudi Arabia and Qatar into armed Salafist groups. One FSA commander interviewed by the Washington Post estimated that 70% of his troops had deserted to radical Islamist units on account of their better funding and weaponry.

Groups such as the Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham have come to the fore, while the supposedly

moderate Free Syrian Army (FSA) has been riven with division. While the FSA is itself divided into various factions, there is also considerable antagonism between the FSA's units inside the country and the external Syrian National Coalition (SNC), which claims to be the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

Early in November, Colonel Abdel-Jabbar Ukaidi, the head of the Aleppo Revolutionary Military Council of the FSA, resigned after the rebels lost the key town of Safira south-east of Aleppo.

The **Lebanese Daily Star** reported that: "Ukaidi said the international community had proven that it had been 'conspiring against the people and the uprising,' and had even more scathing words for the political opposition based outside the country, as he offered sarcastic congratulations 'for your hotels and your political posts.'

"You hardly represent yourselves,' Ukaidi said, adding that politicians were more interested in carrying out foreign agendas rather than seeing to the needs of the Syrian people."

Twelve rebel groups, most of which nominally belong to the Free Syrian Army, joined al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra on September 24 in rejecting the National Coalition's leadership.





President Assad meets supporters

This comes at a time when there are prospects for peace talks at Geneva. However even the SNC's preconditions for negotiation, that a "political transition" must ex-

course on Syria. Washington's hesitancy to further escalate aggression in the region created unlikely bedfellows in the shape of a Saudi-Israeli alliance. Both are



Well-equipped Syrian army

clude President Assad, is not enough for the more radical Islamist groups, which oppose talks of any kind.

SAUDI

Most prominent among the new groups receiving Saudi funding is the Army of Islam, formed on September 29 this year by 43 rebel brigades and battalions in the Damascus region under the leadership of Zahran Alloush, commander of the local Islam Brigade and secretary general of the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front.

Alloush has been particularly strident in his opposition to talks, threatening the SNC sharply that "the coalition will be treated as our enemy, just the same as Bashar al-Assad's regime, if it decides to go to the Geneva II peace conference next month to seek a political solution to the Syrian crisis".

Saudi anger at the Russian-US deal hasn't just been channelled into funding the rebels and taking a more intransigent

implicated in the Syrian conflict, the Saudis directly by supplying cash and arms and the Israelis at least indirectly by means of intelligence sharing, but almost certainly much more.

Paradoxically, both these states are concerned that the Syrian crisis is diverting attention from Iran and its alleged nuclear programme, which are also to be the subject of international talks in Geneva.

The Sunday Times reported on November 17 that Saudi Arabia had agreed to Israeli use of its air space, and assist an Israeli attack on Iran by cooperating on the use of drones, rescue helicopters and tanker planes.

The Times' Tel Aviv correspondent wrote that: "Israel's Mossad intelligence agency is reportedly working with Saudi officials to make arrangements following the signing of a nuclear deal in Geneva. 'Once the Geneva agreement is signed, the military option will be back

on the table. The Saudis are furious and are willing to give Israel all the help it needs,' the Times quoted the source as saying."

KURDS

Yet another complicating factor is the Kurdish question, a historic concern of NATO member Turkey.

Substantial numbers of Kurds were denied Syrian citizenship until a couple of years ago. Falling outside the Baathist's Arab-centric agenda, the Kurds make up a little less than 10% of the Syrian population. The crisis has allowed the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), a group closely allied to the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey, to emerge as a major force.

Despite antagonism to the Assad regime, the PYD has been relatively successful in beating back attempts by Islamist groups to take over the Kurdish areas of northern Syria.

PYD leader Saleh Muslim has announced a provisional administration to rule an autonomous Syrian Kurdish region, which accounts for around one third of Syria's oil fields.

Speaking in Paris in November, Muslim insisted that the PYD militias had effectively crushed the Islamist groups. "About 3,000 of those Salafists have been killed. At the beginning they were strong, but now they aren't so strong. We have found no allies and paid for our own bullets."

However, the PYD has also acknowledged support from the Iraqi-based Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdi-

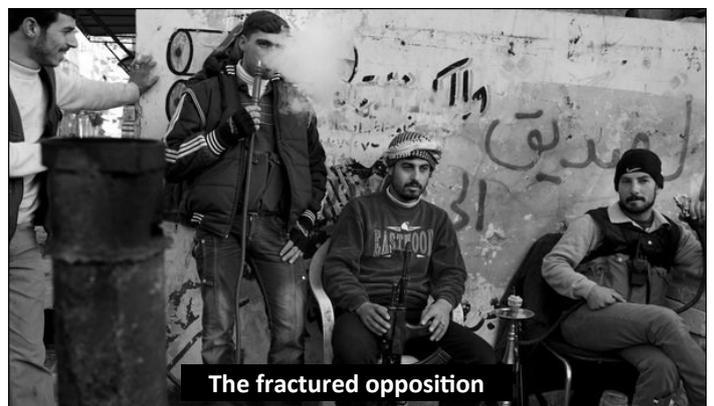
stan. Muslim was quite clear that Turkey has specifically tried to interfere within the Kurdish regions, Ankara is clearly agitated by a resurgent Kurdish movement bordering its own Kurdish districts. "They (the Turkish government) are trying to divide the Kurds by bringing certain (Kurdish) parties into the (opposition) Syrian National Coalition (SNC)," he said. "They are just trying to keep the Kurds from representing themselves."

An autonomous region in Syria, alongside one in Iraq, would leave only Turkey and Iran as states without substantial Kurdish self-government. The Kurdish national question will not go away.

Summary

The regime of Bashar Al-Assad was certainly guilty of violent repression against peaceful demonstrators voicing justifiable discontent with Syria's economic and political stagnation. **Yet the speed with which these peaceful protests were transformed, it might be better to say hijacked, into well armed guerrilla warfare suggests that forces outside the country were already preparing to take advantage of the crisis.**

The fact that three years later, Assad remains in power is testament to the regime's substantial popular support. The successful resistance of Syria to this armed destabilisation programme has only been possible because Christians, Shias and many Sunnis prefer the current regime to any of its alternatives.



The fractured opposition

Iran takes centre stage in the Middle East

Irakli Tusiashvili examines the new developments



Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, endorsed Hassan Rouhani as president of Iran. As a result, today, Iran has a newly elected president who promises to lead a government of 'moderation'. In his first press conference since taking office, Rouhani said that he had the 'political will' to solve the confrontation over Iran's nuclear ambitions, and was ready to negotiate. Despite the fact that, unlike his predecessor, Rouhani's words are refined and carefully chosen, many experts questioned whether the substance had really altered. Given Iran's history of on and off negotiations on its nuclear programme where no progress had been made, in their opinion, the beginning of this diplomatic opening that seemingly represents a possible change of policy, raised no, or little expectations.

Although it is important to remember that it is central for Rouhani to have the support of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, if he is to have ability to make any change in foreign policy, some commentators on Iran say that the supreme leader fully trusts him. Because Khamenei – who commands the leadership of the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards, country's all armed

forces, and who has the loyalty of the largest bloc of conservatives in Iran's parliament – holds most of power.

Rouhani's diplomatic opening started off well, with the first series of talks in Geneva which was intended to test the water; to show goodwill and to establish some basic measure of trust; and to buy time – six months – during which the negotiators can seek to resolve the complex issues surrounding Iran's nuclear activities.

After all, the whole point of stepping up economic sanctions against Iran was to force it to the negotiating table to try to reach a deal on its nuclear programme. And it did just that. But the question still remains: how far is the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, willing to compromise and give his much needed support and trust to Rouhani? In the memoirs of a former Iranian diplomat, Hossein Mousavian, Ayatollah Khamenei is reported to have told Rouhani, while he served as Khamenei's top nuclear negotiator, in the specific context of enrichment: 'I would never abandon the rights of the country as long as I am alive.'

Constitutional amendments in 1989 created a presidential system with presidency as a powerful office. Rouhani is in

charge of appointing cabinet ministers who has been approved by the parliament, but unwritten law requires all officials to abide by the supreme leader. However, Khamenei knows that for much of the last decade, periodic tensions between the office of the leader and the office of the president over authority have often been the source of political instability – a reflection of the tensions between religious-political rule and the democratic aspirations of many Iranian politicians. In order to see how the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, retained his authority unchallenged, and outmanoeuvred and neutralized earlier presidents whose basic policies he did not always embraced, a brief look is indeed interesting.

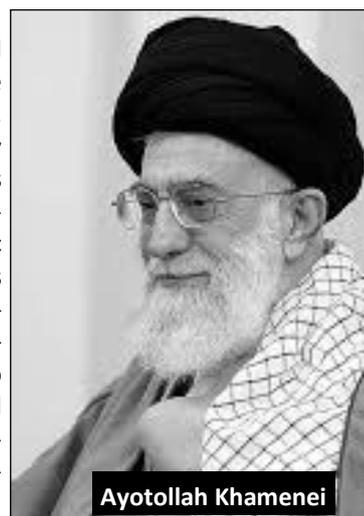
Shortly after Hashemi Rafsanjani won the presidential elections in 1989, the two men – Ayatollah Khamenei and Rafsanjani – had competed for power and the right to define the revolution. Although Rafsanjani supported Khamenei in his selection as the new supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the death of the founder of the Iranian Revolution and the leader Ayatollah Khomeini, many experts on Iran have argued that the reason was that Rafsanjani knew that Khamenei was a middle-ranking cleric and weaker figure who could not rival his political authority. Nonetheless, Khamenei had made it clear that the supreme leader, rather than president, should be the theocracy's key decision-maker. But, during his two terms as president, Rafsanjani's policies – economic liberalisation, better relations with the West, and empowering Iran's elected bodies – represented a challenge to Khamenei's conservative and dogmatic stance. But the reason Khamenei tolerated Presi-

dent Rafsanjani's policies, as experts maintain, was because he had little choice as a newly elected leader, and lacked clear and strong support network in post-Khomeini politics.

But he used the time to build his own power base – building support among the political elite through exploitation of factional politics, and expanding control over the armed forces, particularly the powerful Revolutionary Guards.

Khamenei began siding with the factions opposed to Rafsanjani, and whenever he had opportune moments for criticising Rafsanjani's policies, he would readily do so. Arguably, Rafsanjani's unexpected resignation as commander in chief of the Revolutionary Guards was the turning-point in Khamenei's ascendancy. He immediately took over command of all of the armed forces, which was followed by forced retirements of four thousand Revolutionary Guards, leading to speculation that those purged from the Guards were supporters of Rafsanjani.

Then there was Mohammad Khatami who enjoyed landslide victory in presidential elections in 1997 and had tremendous backing among the population at large. The Khatami era was characterised as a period of political openings not experienced since the revolution's early months.





Policing women's dress code

In foreign policy, during his two terms as president, Khatami adopted the language that called for a 'dialogue among civilizations.' Khatami favoured changes hardliners as well as Khamenei found threatening: a liberal press law, an independent judiciary, a ban on Revolutionary Guards' involvement in the economy, and most importantly, limits on the supreme leader's wide powers.

Nonetheless, Khatami would often be prevented from making friendly gestures in foreign policy towards the US and the West – often seen as a betrayal of the revolution – as he lacked the support of the supreme leader. Khamenei, by siding with hardliners, responded harshly by making sure that the judiciary would close majority of publications, virtually shutting down the reformist press. And he also prevented parliament from passing a more liberal press law. Moreover, journalists and intellectuals who favoured Khatami's politics were arrested and jailed, including purging those close to him. And Khatami seemed helpless to protect them. The president's unprecedented popular mandate and a combative press were no match for the institutional might of the conservatives and

the supreme leader. In this wider context, it can be argued that Khatami's initial support for Ahmadinejad, who first ran for the presidency in 2005, was partially because he had no connections to Khomeini. He was also not a cleric with religious standing that could undermine the authority of the supreme leader. As a result, Ayatollah Khamenei had managed to clear the field. Even though Khamenei supported Ahmadinejad in his disputed re-election in 2009, which provoked mass popular protest and a harsh government crackdown, there had been rumours that Ahmadinejad had been seeking to undermine clerical rule and the supreme leader's authority. As some commentators on Iran observed, since his re-election, Ahmadinejad has sought to put forward a more nationalist perspective, as his allies spoke of an 'Iranian Islam' – giving preference to Iranian culture rather than Islamic culture. He therefore became more openly critical of the power of the Ayatollahs.

He also had been able to build a base of support among the very constituencies on which Khamenei himself depends, most importantly the Revolutionary Guards and the judiciary. Furthermore, shortly



Iranian revolutionary guards

after the beginning of his presidential term, Ahmadinejad appointed his close friend Mashaei as first vice president, who is believed to have opposed to the overarching role and influence of the clerics in Iranian politics.

Mashaei's growing influence had caused direct confrontation between the president and the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei. As many experts believe, Ahmadinejad's effort was a wider plan of consolidating power to put one of his cronies in the presidency.

Rouhani's pragmatic foreign policy. And that a priority for any improvement in Iran's economy is the removal of international sanctions over the nuclear programme can be seen in this context; therefore, Rouhani's policy of 'moderation' and diplomatic opening.

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Iranian nuclear talks

Khamenei responded by challenging Mashaei's appointment, and Ahmadinejad had to reluctantly accept the supreme leader's orders.

To go back to Iran's newly elected president, the biggest question is how much flexibility during the period of negotiations to resolve Iran's nuclear activity Rauhani will be given by the Supreme Leader, who will ultimately decide whether to abide by the terms of the agreement with the West. It can be argued that while the onslaught from conservative press and from Iran's politically powerful Revolutionary Guards on one side and pragmatics political agenda on the other, trying to shape Iran's foreign policy, the Supreme Leader's support and trust can evaporate if he feels his political authority is threatened. However, it can be said that Khamenei is not immune from the influence of the people around him, including his citizens' support for

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