

WHY DO THE SYRIAN PEOPLE RUN AWAY FROM THEIR OWN ARMY?

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 Analysis

Have you seen any of the images or videos coming from Idlib recently?

Did you see the waves of hundreds of thousands of Syrian people fleeing their homes towards the Turkish borders?

If you are not familiar with what is happening in Syria, then a lot of questions would probably have crossed your mind.

If the Syrian regime - as it claims - is launching this insane war to liberate its citizens and save them from terrorist organizations, then why are the Syrian people trying to escape the exact army that is trying to "protect" them?

Wouldn't it make more sense to go towards the people who are trying to help you? Why would civilians burn down their houses before they leave? Aren't they supposed to come back to these same houses once the Syrian

army successfully takes control? Didn't Russia open safe corridors for the civilians? Why isn't anyone using them?

Dozens of unanswered questions can be asked while seeing hundreds of thousands of families carrying very little with them and fleeing towards the unknown. It might not be easy to answer all of these questions in a simple way, but Dr. Azmi Bishara, General Director of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, managed to answer these questions briefly when he said,

"Seeing once again how hundreds of thousands of Syrians prefer sleeping in the open in this freezing winter rather than staying in their houses under Assad's control, is more than enough to help you understand the nature of this regime. Also, allowing Assad's forces to loot the towns and villages and steal people's properties clarifies the image more than a lot of studies."

Clash of Terms

Many terms and statements have been inappropriately used in the media to describe the complexity of the Syrian conflict. If you were to ask a random European or American today to describe the situation in Syria, they would probably use the term “Civil War” which implies that there are two opposing groups from the same country fighting for religious, ethnic or political reasons.

Assad on the other hand has been using different terms to describe the situation. Assad and his allies use terms like “Global Conspiracy” or “War on Terror” to describe the situation in his country, knowing very well how sensitive such terms could imply for the Western audience. On top of that, Assad always tries to portray those against him as extremist religious groups by always putting the spotlight on foreign groups that have dealt with Al-Qaeda, when it was Assad himself that facilitated their entry to Syria.

Assad has a long history of supporting terrorist organizations and using them to serve his agenda. There are many examples to proof this, including his support for Hezbollah in Lebanon; arming some extreme groups and facilitating their entrance to Iraq; and last but not least supporting separatist groups in Turkey that are internationally recognized as terrorist organizations.

The same Assad regime that claims to be fighting terrorism has a long history of committing crimes that are not less heinous than the crimes committed by extremist groups. The Assad regime has been involved in sectarian crimes in the Lebanese civil war and it was also linked to the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri; and let’s not forget the Hama massacre in 1982, where more than 30,000 people were killed in less than a month.

Excessive Brutality

Sometimes the Syrian people have to face questions like, “Why didn’t you try to achieve your demands peacefully and through the ballot boxes?”

The Syrian people often laugh when they hear these types of questions; they know very well that nobody would understand unless those who asked the questions have experienced the level of brutality that they had to deal with. The questions could probably be best answered by watching the videos published by Assad’s forces and their allies when they capture opposition areas.

There are already tons of videos that parade the torture, humiliation of civilians and even slaughtering of people. However, the videos coming out from Idlib recently show how the regime is so eager to take this brutality to a different level. Recent videos show how Assad soldiers are celebrating their victory inside cemeteries by digging graves, taking out dead people’s skulls and bones and destroying them¹.

All of this was done just to show off how brutal and barbaric they can get to get revenge from those who dared to dream of a free country ruled by the law. These leaked images and videos conveyed the message to those living in the opposition areas that, “you have no choice but to face an unimaginable humiliating and brutal punishment. Even being dead won’t help you escape.”

Some might think that these are individual instances that don’t necessarily represent Assad and his regime, but the Syrian people have many stories to tell just about how this regime have encouraged those barbaric acts without holding any of them accountable, allowing them all to tread over anyone who dared to shout “Freedom”.

Living under Assad’s control today could be described with five words: Fear, Humiliation, Corruption, the Absence of law and Oppression. The following reports might help to draw a clear picture.

A report released by “The Syrian Association for Citizens’ Dignity” (a civil rights movement for protecting the rights of refugees and internally displaced citizens) in 2019 was made based on the testimonies of 165 people in Homs, the

Damascus suburbs, Daraa and Aleppo who were forced to return to Syria. Most of those interviewed regret going back to Syria. 60% of them are seriously considering to leave again as soon as they have the opportunity.²

The report indicates that 25% of those who returned to Syria have faced arbitrary detention and some of them had to pay huge amounts (thousands of dollars) just to be saved. 66% of them say that they face constant fear of being arrested or harassed by the security forces or the foreign militias supporting Assad's regime.

Another report issued by "The Syrian Human Rights Network" shows the documentation for more than 2000 arbitrary arrest cases in the last two years alone for people who have returned

to their homes. Another report issued by the United Nations documents 380 arbitrary arrest cases in one single month in the city of Daraa³. Those who were arrested were those who signed reconciliation agreements with the Syrian government that was supposed to guarantee their safe in return to the area under its control.

The Syrian people know very well that what is happening in Syria today is not a civil war. It is not a war on terror and it's definitely not a global conspiracy against Assad. What is happening in Syria today is the struggle of a peaceful and unarmed nation that had to carry arms to protect their existence. It's their struggle to regain their rights and dignity that were stolen by the Assad regime for the last 50 years.

Endnotes

¹ "Syria regime destroys graves, digs up bodies of opposition fighters " , middle east monitor, February 2020 , <http://bit.ly/2wtc5aI>

² "Vengeance, Repression and fear: Reality behind Assad's promises to displaced Syrians», October 2019, <http://bit.ly/39qtBel>

³ Assad urged Syrian refugees to come home. Many are being welcomed with arrest and interrogation, The Washington post , June 2, 2019 , <https://wapo.st/2VuOpgS>