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**Consistency in
Anti-Imperialism:
Syria as a litmus test**

UTD YDSA



Roadmap

- I. History of Syria
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What is Syria?

- ★ **Historical Kingdoms**
- ★ Bilad Ash Sham | Crusader Period | Mamluk Rule
- ★ Ottoman Rule
 - Arab Revolt
 - Sykes-Picot
- ★ **French and British Mandates**
 - Great Syrian Revolt
- ★ **Ideological Struggle**
- ★ Zionism | Ba'athism
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Brief History of Syria

Bilad Ash Sham & Crusader Period

The name "Syria" derives from the ancient Assyrian people who lived in modern day Syria. The Arabic word for Syria is "sham".

Syria has historically been home to many different religious and ethnic groups, and traded hands often between the Byzantines, Islamic empires, and crusader states.

2000 BC-1200

1250-1516

Mamluk Rule

The mamluk sultanate conquered Syria in 1250. A slave dynasty, they had a relatively lenient policy towards Syria's diverse population

1516-1918

Ottoman Rule

In 1516 the Ottoman empire conquered Syria. Unlike previous rulers, the Ottoman's claimed caliph authority. The Ottomans create a system of separation by religion, called the Millet system. Although initially progressive, after the Tanzimat reforms of the 19th century, this became the basis for minority persecution.

1916-1945

French and British Mandates

During the WWI, the Arab nationalists revolted against Ottoman rule, allying with the French and British for their independence. The European powers later betrayed this alliance and transformed Syria, Palestine, and most of the modern Middle East into mandates under the Sykes-Picot agreement. They were eventually overthrown in various revolutions.

1948

Zionism

During the 19th century, a nationalist colonial movement began in Europe, seeking to create a "Jewish state" in the Levant. The British mandate and Balfour's declaration began the process of Zionist colonization of the Levant, primarily in Palestine. This reached its apex when in 1948 the proto-Israeli paramilitaries ethnically cleansed 700k Palestinians from their land

1963

Baathism

In 1963, the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party seized power in Syria in a military coup. The Ba'athist movement in Syria was primarily focused with combating Zionist colonialism in the Levant. The Ba'athist movement had many splits and ideologic differences, both domestically and internationally. In 1971, the Alawite Hafez El Assad overthrew a rival faction within the party, and began the 54 year period of familial rule.

Current Syrian Situation - Balance of Forces



- Various political forces, such as Salafism, the Muslim Brotherhood, Zionism, Phalangism, Neo-Ottomanism, and Ba'athism all vied for influence in Syria during the late 20th and 21st centuries.
- In 2010, a wave of protests spread across the Arab world, including Syria. These protests called for an end of Assad familial rule, but included reactionary elements, such as the aforementioned political forces.
- This marked the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, where groups like Al-Qaeda, Daesh (ISIS), and various affiliated militias (SNA, HTS, FSA, etc) clashed against Ba'athist government forces (SAA).



Current Syrian Situation - Syrian Civil War 2011-2025

- The war was defined by various sectarian massacres committed against Syria's Alawite, Christian, and Shia minorities. These massacres were carried out by Ottomanist, Salafist, and Ikhwani militias, often sponsored by Israel, Turkey, Qatar, KSA, and the United States.
 - One of these militias, Jabhat Al-Nusra (whom had previously split from Al-Qaeda over leadership disagreements) renamed itself into Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham (HTS). This group was founded by ex-ISIS ex-Al-Qaeda commander Abu Mohammad Al Jolani
 - Jolani's forces were responsible for numerous massacres, including the infamous Battle of Maaloula
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An Nusra, HTS and Jolani



An Nusra Front 2012-2016

- Jolani rose to prominence as an salafi jihadist commander under Ayman al-Zawahiri, the former leader of Al-Qaeda. Zawahiri tasked him with commanding AQ's regional Syrian branch, Jabhat An Nusra
- As leader of An Nusra, Jolani and his forces perpetrated war crimes, such as bombings, gas attacks, forced conversions, and ethnic cleansing, against Syrian Christians, Alawis, and Shi'as.
- Durings its Latakia offensive of 2013, AN killed over 200 Alawite civilians and burned their villages. This later expanded into Eastern Syria, with HTS killing 60 Shia villages in Hatla.
- AN claimed responsible for the massacres of 45 alawites in Maskar al Hesan in 2013
- AN invaded Adra, north of Dimashq, and killed 60 Christians, Alawites, Druze, and Shias
- In 2016 HTS slaughtered 42 Druze (Darzi) in the village of Qalb Lawzeh
- In the final days of AN, they massacred 42 villagers and kidnap over 70 people (mostly women) from the village of Zara'a near Hama.



An Nusra, HTS and Jolani (pt 2)

- After perpetrating numerous sectarian war crimes, An Nusra formally split with AQ over leadership disagreements. This led to the founding of the Hay'at Tahrir ash Sham HTS
 - HTS was primarily funded by Turkey and Israel, with a significant monetary contribution from Qatar as well
 - HTS perpetrated sectarian massacres, much like its predecessor, against Syrian Alawites, Christians, Druze, and Shias
 - The Syrian Arab Army had pushed HTS back to the coastal city of Idlib, near the Turkish border, from 2019.

Recent Events (December 2024)



- In 2024, just after the Lebanon ceasefire agreement, HTS launched a push south from Idlib into the cities of Halab, Hama, Homs, and culminating with HTS capture of Syria's capital and largest city, Dimashq.
- Since taking power, HTS has rapidly accelerated its sectarian massacres and ethnic cleansing. Examples include:
 - The February/March mass summary executions of over 2000 alawites on the Latakian coast
 - The El-Mukhtariya massacre, where 40 civilians (mostly Alawite and Christian) were shot and buried in a mass grave.
 - The SOHR announced on March 6th that over 1500 civilians had been killed
 - Other crimes include desecrating corpses, kidnapping/assaulting women, killing children, and forcing captives to convert to Sunni Islam.



Anti-Imperialism





What is Anti-Imperialism?

First, we need to start with Imperialism. While noting the diversity of thought in defining it, our understanding of Imperialism is informed by:

- Seeing imperialism as a global system, not restricted to individual countries
- Understanding it as a stage in the development of capitalism specifically
- Emerging after “Imperial” powers expanded colonialism to the vast majority of the world and subordinated land and people to economic expansion

Anti-Imperialism comes into play when we recognize the violence of Imperialism worldwide, and see that destroying it requires opposing it everywhere (as its a world system) and building socialism (to defeat capitalism)



What is Chauvinism?

It's named after a zealously patriotic soldier, Nicolas Chauvin, under Napoleon Bonaparte as a way of describing people who explicitly or implicitly support the idea of the superiority of one's nation over others.

- Overtly, this looks like the racism and American Exceptionalism of the Trump admin
- Covertly, this looks like the subtle denigration of immigrant cultures as being “backward”

Even progressive movements and individuals can fall prey to chauvinist thinking and act accordingly. For example, look at Bernie Sanders' adoption of racist anti-immigrant rhetoric under the veil of “defending the working class” from cheap foreign labor.





How are Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese liberation tied to the greater Anti-Imperialist struggle in the Levant?

Given our analysis of Imperialism as a global phenomenon, we can see how certain Imperial powers act worldwide and resistance against them. In the Levant, one important Imperial power is the United States, and it uses direct and indirect means in its struggle:

- Directly, it sanctions countries like Iran to force their submission to the interest of the US ruling class and imposes security regimes for “national security” interests
- Indirectly, it supports the Zionist entity and other puppets to fight for its interests and exerts soft power for American Capital’s benefits

The Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese struggles tackle both methods of US Imperial aggression, fighting to survive against sanctions and bombardment directly while also challenging US puppets and their institutions like the GCC, as well as the the Zionist entity’s broader project of building a “Greater Israel”



Action Items





Critiquing Chauvinists

On principles alone, all progressive peoples should criticize chauvinists and chauvinism on an ethical level. Tolerating bigotry harms people worldwide, and those moral constraints shouldn't be ignored in favor of unprincipled "unity."

Practically, critiquing chauvinism also ensures our movements are stronger by bridging communities that could be fractured due to mistrust from previous experience. This tightening of the ranks builds real unity.

In Syria's case, criticizing chauvinists serves an important role in the anti-imperialist struggle as it forces us to see the interconnections between our struggles and unite instead of dividing. Division serves Empire, rectification prepares us to confront it better!



YDSA Specifics - Further Reading

If you're interested in learning more about anti-imperialism, here are some resources to check out:

- “Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism” by Kwame Nkrumah
- “The Divide” by Jason Hickel
- "Killing Hope" by William Blum
- “The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World” by Vijay Prashad
- “False Nationalism False Internationalism” by Tani and Sera

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Any Questions?