

22-03-2018

Awaiting “peace” in Eastern Ghouta

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From besieged Douma, the last remaining pocket of opposition-held Eastern Ghouta, Osama Nassar reflects on the fate awaiting him and his fellow residents as Russia and the Assad regime impose their “settlement” on the region’s starved and battered population.

[Editor’s note: This article was originally published in **Arabic** on 22 March, 2018]

DOUMA, Eastern Ghouta: “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:14)

The military campaign against Eastern Ghouta has imposed its terms locally on civilians, creating a compounded siege pressing them from four sides:

The military pressure practiced by the Russians and the regime through bombardment of unprecedented violence, followed by the ground advance starting one week after the beginning of the escalation on 18 February.

The opposition factions and their ill-disciplined public discourse, and their bombastic local media, and the continued lack of transparency even within the inner circles.

The surrender initiatives.

The difficult medical and humanitarian situation, and the likelihood of internal explosion or exhaustion among the people.

And a direct message was sent to civilians, through various channels, to the effect that stopping the catastrophe necessitates a “realistic” settlement, far removed from the dreams and aspirations of the “[Arab] Spring.”

It may happen—it will happen—that we become victims of an unjust settlement, for justice would seem to be a remote prospect under the present circumstances.

We don’t know the exact form or nature of the outcome, but we know it shall lack justice, for the world is fully prepared to coexist with a “settlement” that “settles” us into the ground, kneading us therein, before trampling upon

us with “peace.”

We don't disagree that the current hellish reality is the result of mistakes, large and small, beginning at the personal level, since the start of the revolution and even before it, extending to the largest circles in international institutions and regional and global relations, as well as to the “deep states” of every country and the world itself, including the multinational corporations and capital; none of this is going to change overnight, and so there will be no just or dignified resolution to the critical problem of Eastern Ghouta now. Nor would it be right for us to include that which is not just within our demands, even if it were inevitable.

And it is not ethical today to focus on blaming the victims (blaming oneself). The revolution erred, yes, but that has nothing to do with its original proposition, which remains rightful, even if it strayed from the path leading to it.

The revolutionaries today are astray, which doesn't for a moment imply the preferability of those who have incurred anger; those of “the Nation's Bosom;” any more than it implies that those who've withdrawn, watching from afar, are on the Straight Path. The sentence refers in several places to Qur'an 1:6-7: “Guide us to the Straight Path; the Path of those You have blessed, not those who have incurred anger, or gone astray.”

Arms were the radical deviation in the revolution; everything else became a foregone conclusion, and a repercussion inherent in the original sin of carrying of weapons at a time of restraint, and competing with the monsters in the field in which they held superiority; namely,

that of monstrosity.

God will not ask us why we didn't change the entire world, but rather whether we did our best in the domains we could change within our small world—which is, incidentally, the way to change the wider world.

Each time we relocate the problem to somewhere outside the circle of influence and the possibility of change, we deviate to that extent from the proper course, and we move from thinking of solutions to thinking of excuses and justifications. We need to take a step back, and work in the sphere in which we're able to create a difference, rather than drowning in sifting the black from the white, and cursing the rest of the board, and the pieces upon it, and the hands that move them.

And from here, our task is not to put forth initiatives. The revolution's unalterable aim is freedom, dignity, and justice, and all that they require, and these are the values that lead necessarily to the proper, sought-after peace.

“Enter wholeheartedly into peace, and do not follow in Satan's footsteps;” From Qur'an 2:208. The word for “peace,” *silm*, is also rendered “submission to God” in some translations. Satan being the tyrant. Calmness in a land of tyranny is not peace.

We are supposed to call for peace at all times, not only now. We call for our peace, or our wellbeing, so we become a replica of the West, which calls for democracy on its land only, while supporting tyranny everywhere else, and calls for human rights in the “First World,” and to hell with

humans and their rights in the other Worlds.

During that, and before it, and always, we continue to put forth the bare truth, which coheres with the fundamental foundation of laws:

The bombing of cities, and the killing of their residents, is a crime, irrespective of its perpetrator and its extent. The forced displacement of residents from their properties and land is a crime, as is imprisoning them within a patch of territory, or preventing them from traveling within their country.

Compelling men, young and old, to bear arms in battles and in-fighting against their will is a crime.

The most heinous crime is forcing people to change their convictions, under the threat of weapons or harm (bodily or moral); this is the ordeal worse than death, for it is the killing of the soul of the human, and their humanity itself.

The last of these four is the “settlement” proposed in every Syrian city and town; the new norm being, after the weapons are handed over and the gunmen are evacuated, and the television stations supporting the killers have done their reports on the “liberation” of the area by “the valiant army,” for the males of the area to be conscripted into the same army; the one that was bombing and besieging and then invading them, plundering their properties; in order for them to perpetrate the same acts against other Syrians in other Syrian areas.

And, equally, there returns the question the answer to which leads to the sifting of positions:

What is to be done?

Pragmatism: “The situation is difficult, and critical, and we should deal with it realistically.” Or, “What you’re saying is true, but...”—and how many are the buts, overturning any preamble or logic. After each “but,” the speaker plunges into realism and pragmatism until they transform into a part of this mistake, and their task becomes selecting their place in the phantom of the mistake, and justifying it.

Purity: “Everyone is in the wrong... our society wasn’t ready for change... the revolutionaries bomb civilians as well... and they have prisons and violations... everyone let us down... we told you,” and dozens of other logical preambles, all of them leading to an unwritten conclusion; namely, the resignation from action.

Those who disdain wading in the mud, so as not to dirty their clothes, maintain their clean clothing while watching the horror film, but their souls grow sullied.

Besides these two, there are those opting to walk on the knife’s edge; who choose to work with realistic tools to change the situation, and if reality resists change, they redraw attention to the truth, plain and simple, without “buts.”

That might not mean anything for observers, and it may be hard to distinguish between the short-term outcome for each of the three categories. Yet the gain of the last is that they bear witness against all, and against the reality resistant to change. As such, neither do they wallow in the mire, nor sip coffee on the balcony of the ivory tower, but rather chant for their perpetual and absolute rights: freedom, dignity, justice!

