

As long-time anti-war and anti-imperialist activists, we were deeply disheartened to see the recent open letter “A Call to Defend Rojava” (<http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/04/23/a-call-to-defend-rojava/>), signed by a number of people with records of anti-war activism.

We empathize with the suffering faced by Syria’s Kurds at the hands of ISIS, the Turkish military and foreign-backed paramilitary forces, but the “Call to Defend Rojava” makes a number of serious errors, particularly by demanding what amounts to an escalation of the criminal and disastrous US military intervention in Syria, which has underpinned much of the violence face by all Syrians, including Kurds, since 2011.

We wish to reiterate the following points :

1. Demanding continued US support for the SDF in Syria, which means maintaining an illegal presence of U.S military bases, soldiers, advisors and special forces, is nothing less than a call for an escalated, criminal US military intervention in Syria.
2. Kurds have a right to self-defence against ISIS and against Turkish aggression, but the US cannot, has not, and will not play a positive role in the Syrian war, however one wishes to characterize it. The US military and security forces are not supporting the SDF because they are concerned about Kurdish civilians’ lives, and certainly not because they support anarchism. American military support for the SDF is entirely self-interested, and the United States will betray Syrian Kurds at the first opportunity.
3. Kurds are not the only people in Muslim and Arab countries to fight for progressive causes, including feminism and secularism. Implying that they are, in order to win support for the SDF among American leftists and liberals, plays on racist stereotypes about Arabs and Arab political history.
4. Turkey’s aggression in northern Syria is a war crime, but Turkey is far from the only aggressor in Syria. American activists singling Turkey out for criticism for its role in Syria only serves to whitewash, excuse, and obscure America’s own ongoing military intervention in the region, including in Syria. Turkey should not be a NATO member because NATO should not exist. Implying that NATO could play a positive role in world affairs simply by scapegoating Turkey is a serious error.
5. The final constitutional structure and peace settlement in Syria needs to be determined by Syrians, not by external great powers. It is important to remember the disastrous history of imperialist powers drawing and redrawing borders in their former colonies, particularly in the Middle East. In fact, an ethnic and sectarian partition of Syria has been a goal of many neoconservatives for some time, not for particularly altruistic reasons.
6. US military intervention is never humanitarian. Every advocate for US “humanitarian interventions” has been wrong: in Iraq, in Yugoslavia, in Afghanistan, in Libya, and now in Syria. “A Call to Defend Rojava” demands an escalation of US military intervention in Syria, which is particularly shocking and disappointing because it betrays the principles and better judgement which many signatories have defended in the past.

Fundamentally, we are motivated by the conviction that the chief responsibility of anti-war and anti-imperialist activists living in imperialist countries is to oppose the imperialist policies of their own governments. "A Call to Defend Rojava" betrays this principle. While anti-war protest movements are not always successful, betraying anti-war principles in order to provide left cover for imperialist wars is never successful.

We live in very dangerous times, and one of our most urgent priorities must be to rebuild the networks, politics and movements of international solidarity and resistance to imperialist wars.

Signed,

[TO ADD YOUR NAME AS A SIGNATORY, FILL OUT THIS SHORT FORM:

<https://goo.gl/forms/aK7w0fdtocGwblqt2>]

Signatures appear in alphabetical order.

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