

An Impossible Syrian Victory. The ISIS Defeated “By Our Adversaries”

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“...before it fell back into government hands last weekend”, notes a National Public Radio reporter Monday morning. He’s clearly disappointed, unable to utter even a suggestion that that event marks a military success against ISIS (IS, ISIL, Daesh). What’s this about? Well, it’s the Syrian army, working with Russian air power, retaking Palmyra, a major city in central Syria which in May 2015 was ransacked and occupied by ISIS.

As far as I’m aware ISIS is still the number one enemy of civilized society, the acronym that sends shudders across the globe, the most reviled evil entity in modern times, defined days before that episode by US secretary of state Kerry as a [“genocidal’ agency](#), also a force which during its three years of existence has eluded the strategic thinking of western governments, their military experts and their rebel allies within Syria. Yet, here was a notable (and unexpected) turn of events: an ISIS defeat! Oughtn’t we to celebrate? At least, if we’re unable to bring ourselves to acknowledge the merits of Syria’s government forces, some credit is due its Russian partner and ally.

At their most generous, US commentators describe the success of Syrian and Russian efforts against ISIS as “a mystery”. Just today US secretary of defense Ashton Carter, asked about US strategies to combat ISIS, utters not a word about the retaking of Palmyra and instead mutters some vacuous remarks about how ISIS’s defeat remains a target of [US policy in the region](#)

Western media responses to Washington’s embarrassment of the Russian/Syrian success takes two forms, both manifestly biased. BBC, NPR radio, TV networks and print media chose to highlight Palmyra’s [ancient Roman ruins](#) over examining what that military success really meant. Our defenders of western civilization seem in need of assurance from archeologists about the fate of the [Temple of Bel](#) and the “arch of triumph”. They agonize over what relics had or hadn’t been destroyed by ISIS? (How many of these concerned people dared to visit Syria before 2011 to witness the country’s many achievements, enjoy its theater, contemporary arts and ancient wonders?)

In recent news reports, one finds no reference to the (liberated) people of Palmyra city—you know, that “horrific humanitarian situation”. Have any residents of the region survived? What about Syrian soldiers captured in the initial ISIS occupation of Palmyra? What about the notorious Palmyra prison where many Syrians languished? Had they been unchained only to be recruited by ISIS in 2015 to vent their fury against their own land (like Saddam Hussein’s prisoners in 2003 and inmates of Kuwait’s prisons in 1991 who, it is rumored, were let loose to savage and pillage the libraries and museums of Iraq)?

The New York Times predictably cast the recent Syrian military achievement in a negative light, charging that it bolsters Bashar Al-Assad's confidence and ambitions, referring to Al-Assad as 'stubbornly confident', 'a survivor adept at juggling allies', yet further evidence that he is a '[master of survival](#)'.

If the victorious forces over ISIS had been headed by any US ally, however extremist or brutal its reputation, we'd see Americans cheering in the streets like they did after their murder of Bin Laden, with book contracts readied for personal testimonies of our heroic American forces, pages of profiles of rebel allies and speculation of who among them might be Syria's 'first democratically elected president'.

Scanning the media, one has to credit [Russian sources](#) with providing a reasonable assessment of military operations in and around Palmyra. One is hard pressed to find mention of 'victory' in other press accounts, although an Indian magazine with a more [balanced take](#) cites how many Syrian fathers, sons and brothers were martyred in this action. (It is rumored that during this conflict, close to 100,000 Syrian soldiers have been killed.) What about a thought for these young, anonymous conscripts?

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