

The Syrian Vote: The People Reject Regime Change

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Global Research, June 12, 2014

[CounterPunch](#) 11 June 2024

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

If one is sincere about resolving the bloody three year-old conflict in Syria, one would regard the outcome of the presidential election held on the 3rd of June 2014 as an opportunity for working out a viable solution.

The election was a genuine endorsement of the leadership of Bashar al-Assad. 73% of eligible voters cast their ballots in the first ever multi-candidate direct presidential election in Syria. Assad secured 88.7 % of the votes. There were no allegations of electoral fraud or manipulation. It is significant that Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan — hosts to the majority of refugees from the on-going war in Syria — voted overwhelmingly for Assad.

It is of course true that those parts of the country which are still in rebel hands could not vote. This would be mainly some parts of rural Syria and one medium-sized city. But all the other cities — and they account for the majority of the population — went to the ballot-box. US officials and the Western media have dismissed the election result contemptuously because a portion of the electorate could not vote, ignoring the fact that the vast majority participated enthusiastically in the polls. They have conveniently forgotten that in the presidential election in Ukraine on the 25th of May millions of Russian speaking voters in the eastern part of the country refused to participate and yet the verdict was endorsed by the centres of power in the West. This is yet another example of blatant double standards.

Instead of rubbishing the election result, Western leaders and commentators should try to find out why the Syrian people showed so much enthusiasm for the election and why they gave so much support to Assad.

One, for the vast majority of Syrians, the election was their repudiation of the war and the killings that have claimed tens of thousands of lives since March 2011. It was their way of affirming their commitment to peace and stability. The proud and dignified Syrian citizen had chosen the ballot-box to appeal to the world to end the war and to usher in peace.

Two, the Syrians know that the only leader who can bring peace and stability to their land is Bashar al-Assad since he has always commanded the support of the majority of his people. The election proved his popularity. In spite of what the Western and most of the West Asian media have been telling us about how the majority Sunnis are revolting against a minority Alawite-Shia leader, most of the Sunnis voted for Assad, as did various minority groups, from Shias to Christians. Assad also has the backing of the armed forces, the public service and the business community.

Three, there is also a great deal of appreciation among the people for the way in which the Assad government has managed to ensure that essential goods and services are available to a broad cross-section of the people in spite of the terrible devastation and destruction

caused by the war.

Four, the election result is also a show of appreciation of the role played by the armed forces which has lost at least sixty-one thousand men in the war and which in the eyes of the people has succeeded in protecting the innocent and preventing some brazen massacres. It in no way justifies, it should be emphasized, some of the excesses committed by the armed forces which a number of us have condemned from the outset.

Five, if Assad won so convincingly it is also partly because the opposition is hopelessly divided. The different armed groups are pitted against each other. There is no common platform. They were not even able to put forward a common candidate in the election.

Six, more than the opposition's utter disarray it is the barbaric brutality of some of the armed groups revealed in so many episodes in the war that turned a lot of Syrians against them and indirectly increased support for Assad. What has caused even greater revulsion among the people is the claim of these groups that they are the true representatives of Islam.

Seven, since some of these groups are foreign and the foreign hands behind the war are so obvious to most Syrians, rallying around Assad in the election was the people's response to what they perceive as a massive foreign conspiracy to break Syria's principled resistance to US helmed hegemony — hegemony that serves the interests of Israel. Ousting Assad is central to the goal of breaking resistance. This is why the people sought through the ballot-box to foil a determined push to achieve regime-change in Damascus.

This, in the ultimate analysis, is the real significance of Assad's electoral triumph. The Syrian people have defeated a violent, aggressive attempt at achieving regime-change as part of that perpetual plan to ensure US and Western hegemony, especially in a region which is pivotal to their quest for global domination. Apart from Israel which launched a number of air-strikes against Syria in the course of the war, some of the West's other regional allies like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey have also played a major role in pursuit of this diabolical agenda.

Given that the US and some of its allies are democracies, will they now concede that since the Syrian people have spoken, they will respect their wishes and cease their pursuit of regime change? It is most unlikely that they would. After all, hegemony has always taken precedence over democracy. Hegemony trumps everything else. Does it matter to the hegemon and its allies that if they continue along this path, thousands more are going to die or become refugees in some other land?

Perhaps one should reach out to ordinary American citizens in the hope that they would persuade their government to put an end to the war and create the conditions for peace in Syria. It may be worthwhile trying this approach. A Pew Research Centre poll conducted in 2013 showed that "70% of Americans oppose arming the Syrian rebels." Can they now be convinced that arming rebels against a democratically elected president nullifies everything that a democracy stands for? Can we expect American citizens to share the dream of their Syrian counterparts for an end to war in their land? Will they act to make that dream come true?

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