

Walking Through Aleppo: “Why Did Your Government Do This”. I Don’t Want to Hear You Say, “I’m Sorry.”

By [Greta Berlin](#)

Global Research, November 04, 2019

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)
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We had spent most of the day in the destroyed Armenian quarter of Aleppo. Nothing remained to be salvaged, the foreign mercenaries, supported by the US and its lapdogs had made sure of it. The most beautiful place in Aleppo was rubble, the streets empty except for the lone parked car or boy on a bike navigating the wreckage.

Our ebullient guide, Abdul, a man who had spent his life escorting people around Syria and was now in his 60s, started to talk about the quarter, how magnificent it once was. He stood in the middle of what was once as square surrounded by lush greenery, cafés, stores and apartments. Only two lone, stripped trees at the end of the square bore testament to what was.

He began to cry, “Why? Why did your government do this? What was the reason? There is nothing strategic here. It was a deliberate attack on our heritage, our beauty. The terrorists destroyed the gem of Aleppo and for what? Can you tell me?”

And we had no answers. There are no answers. From October 17-26, we eight Americans traveled to Syria to see for ourselves. Most of us are longtime activists in the Middle East.

The US/NATO/Israeli axis of evil spent eight years trying to destroy Syria in the same way they decimated Iraq. The fact they didn’t succeed is a combination of Syrian civilian determination, Syrian military prowess, and the intervention (asked for by the Syrian government) of Russia. But at such a terrible price: 500,000 Syrians killed, over 3/5 of them, young soldiers, millions fleeing their homes and businesses to other countries as the juggernaut of foreign fighters forced them out, millions more internally displaced.

We walked Damascus...Homs...Maaloula...Palmyra...Hama...Aleppo...Lattakia and many small villages during our 10-day “witness trip” through Syria. We had no minders. We had no one telling us who we could talk to, so we talked to everyone... on the street, in the cafés and hotels, in shops and restaurants and playing backgammon in the ruins of Aleppo. Everyone wanted to talk to us, to tell us the stories.

“Welcome, welcome, we are happy to see Americans here. Come...have tea, sit with us, let me tell you our story, we know it’s not your fault, Welcome, welcome, have some tea.”

And our hearts broke every time, the stories of rape, beheadings and pillage committed by

foreign mercenary terrorists (as the Syrians called them), part of the so-called 'moderate rebels'.

"They were being paid with American dollars through proxies in the Gulf. Some of them fought for \$300.00 a month, then when things got really tough, the stakes were raised, and we heard some were being paid \$1000.00 plus a month." Said one of the waiters at a restaurant.

Few of the mercenaries were Syrian. They poured into Syria from Turkey, had been taught guerrilla warfare in camps in Jordan and, if injured, were treated in Israeli hospitals in the occupied Golan Heights. They were armed to the teeth with smuggled munitions that had been brought through Jordan and Turkey after the fall of Libya with the approval of the US government.

At one point, one of our guides told us the Syrian army rounded up 100,000 Toyota jeeps, all from the US given to the foreign fighters.

On one of our last days, we went to the famous Baron Hotel in Aleppo, the place where Agatha Christie wrote, where TE Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) stayed, as well as dignitaries like Churchill. No one stays at the hotel any longer even though fighting has stopped for over a year. The famous bar that used to serve exotic drinks looks exactly as it did 45 years ago when I was there, except the hotel maintenance people went down to the cellar and drained several wine kegs into bottles, put them in the bar to make it look the way it once did.

The Armenian/Syrian woman who owned the hotel sat down and talked to us. When we reached out to say we were sorry, she said, "I don't want to hear you're sorry. What good does that do? Will it bring the hotel back? Does it compensate for the terrorist snipers who shot across our porch for months, preventing anyone from coming in and destroying the business? Will it bring the people who were murdered back? Do you think that's what we need to hear, 'I'm sorry?' We need answers. Do you have any?"

She was so angry, and we were so ashamed. We listened to her, for that's all we could do.

Our visit was not about politics. It wasn't about whom to blame as there are plenty to go around. We were eight civilian Americans talking to dozens of civilian Syrians. It's the only way there will be any kind of reconciliation.

It is our only hope.

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Greta Berlin is the Co-Founder of the Free Gaza movement, www.freegaza.org and the author/editor of Freedom Sailors, a book about the first successful trip to Gaza in August 2008. She is also an English teacher and has spent the past few years (after her retirement) teaching English in Morocco, Spain and Iraq.

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