



## Defiant Syria: On A Journey Through Syria, A Canadian Anti-War Activist Discovers The Country's Resilient Spirit

Ken Stone's E-Booklet Launch Of "Defiant Syria" at World Social Forum, Montreal

Par [Ken Stone](#) et [Stephen Gowans](#)

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*Long-time anti-war activist and political commentator, Ken Stone, will launch his new e-booklet, "Defiant Syria", at a workshop at the World Social Forum (WSF) on Wednesday, August 10 at 1 pm. The venue will be Cégep du Vieux Montréal (Local 884), 255, Rue Ontario E., Montreal.*

*Mr. Stone participated in the Second International Tour of Peace to Syria in mid-April, 2016, during which the group observed the Syrian parliamentary elections of April 13, visited Homs to witness the destruction and reconstruction, and were the very first tourists to be allowed on the site of the ancient Roman city of Palmyra, just liberated from ISIS by the Syrian Arab Army with Russian air support, just two weeks earlier.*

*Mr. Stone will give an eye-witness report from Syria and afterwards will be available for a Q&A and the signing and selling of print copies of his pamphlet at \$5 apiece. His talk will focus, in part, on the propaganda war against Syria mounted in the West to coincide with its illegal aggression against that country using terrorist mercenary armies as foot soldiers.*

*The e-booklet is now available on all major internet bookselling platforms, including Amazon, Kobo, and iTunes.*

*The e-booklet launch at the WSF is sponsored by the Syria Solidarity Movement (SSM) of which Ken Stone is a founding, executive member. Mr. Stone will also participate in two other SSM-sponsored workshops at the WSF, led by Professor Nour El-Kadri:*

*- "Syria and International Law", Thursday, August 11, 1300 - 15:30*

*Université McGill - Pavillon Rutherford (Local 112), 3600, rue University*

*- "Syria & Palestine", Friday, August 12, 13:00-15-30*

*Cégep du Vieux Montréal (Local 982), 255, Rue Ontario E*

*For further info, please contact Ken at 905-383-7693 at home or [kenstone@cogeco.ca](mailto:kenstone@cogeco.ca). You may also text him, starting on Monday, August 8, at 289-339-7023.*

*Please see below a review of "Defiant Syria" by Stephen Gowans*

## Defiant Syria: On A Journey Through Syria, A Canadian Anti-War Activist Discovers The Country's Resilient Spirit

July 8, 2016

By Stephen Gowans

Last April, veteran anti-war activist Ken Stone travelled to Syria as part of a seven person solidarity mission with the people of Syria, becoming one of the first tourists to visit liberated Palmyra. Stone recounts his trip in *Defiant Syria: Dispatches from the Second International Tour of Peace to Syria*.

The short book is part travelogue, part diatribe against those sections of the political left which reliably support US-led interventions in formerly colonized countries, and part trenchant critique of Canadian foreign policy in connection with Syria.

Stone's journey through Syria left him struck by the defiance of Syrians in the face of the immense challenges they've confronted and the struggles they've endured.

"I was surprised," he writes, "at the resilience of the Syrian spirit. I expected to find Syrians depressed, exhausted, and pessimistic after five long years of war. Instead, they were full of life and defiance."

Part of that defiance was expressed in the Syrian government insisting, over the objections of Western powers, on holding parliamentary elections in April, as mandated by Syria's 2012 constitution, which was drafted and popularly ratified in response to the demands of the opposition in 2011.

Stone was in Damascus on the day of the election, and devotes a chapter of his book to the mechanics of parliamentary democracy in Syria and what he observed as Syrians went to the polls. He draws a contrast between the government controlled capital, where calm prevailed and residents were determined to cast their ballots, and nearby Ghouta, where "all kinds of foreign mercenaries hold the population hostage and in terror."

I was struck, reading this, by another contrast. On top of parliamentary elections, Syrians elect their president, and the last presidential election in 2012 was open to multiple candidates. In contrast, there are no elections held in jihadist-controlled territories. The jihadists, not only ISIS and al Nusra, but many of the mislabelled "moderate rebels," doted on by Western countries, and who are enmeshed with al-Nusra, view democracy as idolatry, and don't favor it for the successor state they envision.

None of this has stopped the former NATO colonial powers from backing the democracy-adverse jihadists. Nor has it stopped Washington and its NATO allies from working with democracy-abominating Arab monarchies—which, by the way, were installed by the colonial powers—to bring down an elected government in Damascus whose guiding political philosophy is anti-colonialism and freedom from foreign interference.

Framed this way, it's not difficult to see who the villains are in this piece, and what lies at the root of the war—not a revolutionary eruption of civil society for democracy but a reactionary eruption of former colonial powers, in alliance with Wahhabi-inspired Islam, for

renewed domination of Syria.

If the claim about the United States and its allies forging an alliance with Sunni sectarian Islamists seems extreme, consider this: In March, the Wall Street Journal quoted Michael Oren, former Israeli ambassador to the United States, and now a member of the Israeli parliament, declaring that “If we had to choose between ISIS and Assad, we’ll take ISIS.”

Mainstream commentators, from journalists Robert Fisk and Patrick Cockburn of the Independent to Anne Barnard and Hwaida Saad of the New York Times, along with the United States’ own Congressional Research Service, have either described the US-led coalition’s fight against ISIS in Syria as largely symbolic or standing down when Islamic State attacks Syrian government forces. Washington is reluctant to stop ISIS from doing as much damage as it can in Syria, a form of collusion with the Wahhabi-inspired Sunni sectarians, in pursuit of a shared goal of ousting Assad, whose crime appears to be adherence to secular Arab nationalist goals of freedom from foreign interference, Arab unity, and socialism.

In a similar manner, British foreign secretary Philip Hammond, with an imperial arrogance befitting an official of the empire, told the New York Times last November that if al-Qaeda accepts the West’s conditions, it should be allowed to contribute to shaping Syria’s future, but not Assad, the elected president.

As for al Nusra, whose fighters are regularly patched up in Israeli hospitals and then sent back across the border to continue their fight against secularism and non-sectarianism, the New York Times and Wall Street Journal have run article after article noting that US-trained rebels are enmeshed with, cooperating with, ideologically similar to, sharing arms with, and embedded with the al Qaeda affiliate in Syria.

None of this is lost on Stone, who blames Washington, and its military alliance NATO, for Syria’s tribulations. A “cabal of mainly western NATO countries with the help of various Arab monarchs” has “recruited, trained, and coordinated” the insurgents, he writes. NATO’s sponsorship of jihadists—whom Stone calls terrorist mercenaries—is the root cause, in his view, of the chaos that plagues the country.

Stone argues that a direct line of causation can be traced from another aspect of the chaos of Syria to the West’s interventionist policies in the Middle East, namely, the refugee crisis in Europe. “It’s no accident,” he writes, “that the wave of refugees that has literally washed ashore on the coastlines of Southern Europe, dead and alive, is composed mostly of Syrians, Libyans, and Afghans, precisely the victims of NATO military interventions in those three countries.”

The implications for how to resolve the refugee crisis are clear, says Stone. The “lesson is that, if you don’t want to turn millions of innocent civilians into refugees and subsequently find them at your frontiers, you should oppose military interventions in other countries.”

This should resonate with Canadians, whose government has agreed to settle 25,000 refugees from the war-torn country. It is “a fine humanitarian gesture,” Stone notes, but is “treating the symptom rather than the disease.” The “war could end in months,” he predicts, “if the predominantly NATO countries, who have organized the aggression against Syria” brought an end to “their support of the foreign mercenaries operating in that country and leaned on Turkey and Jordan to close their borders to them.”

Stone fulminates against “otherwise intelligent people” who’ve fallen for the myth that the Syrian insurgency is a democratic uprising of civil society against a brutal dictator, rather than a regime change operation sponsored by Washington and its satellites, in the pattern of Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Honduras, Libya, and Somalia.

“It’s not as if Syria is the very first government targeted for regime change by the USA,” he writes. Still, “there is never a shortage of ‘leftists’ in the West who can be either bought or convinced through their incredible naïveté, warped political outlook, or Eurocentric arrogance, that the motives of the Empire are good,” he observes.

Stone reserves particular venom for an article that appeared in the September 2015 issue of *The New Internationalist*. A retired teacher colleague of Stone’s went out of his way to place a copy of the magazine, featuring the article “The forgotten revolution of Syria,” in Stone’s hands so he could read it in advance of his trip to Syria. Stone dismissed it as “shit.”

The Hamilton-based activist bids us to contrast “the hostile treatment with which the Canadian government unfairly treats the secular and pluralist Syrian government to the friendly treatment (including arms sales and an open invitation to fund mosques across Canada) it offers to the despotic and sectarian Saudi Arabian monarchy, the fountainhead of Wahhabi terrorism around the world.”

Stone also takes Ottawa to task for provide refuelling, reconnaissance, and transport aircraft services to the US-led Coalition, which violates Syria’s sovereignty by carrying out military operations in the country without the slightest regard for the wishes of Syrians or their elected government. This makes Canada “an accomplice, not directly involved in bombing Syria, but doing something akin to driving the getaway car rather than actually robbing the bank,” Stone observes.

The veteran leftist also faults the Canadian government for sending 800 Canadian military trainers to reinforce Kurdish Peshmerga forces in northern Iraq. He argues that this is part of an effort to detach the pro-West Kurdish north completely from Iraq by making it militarily independent of Baghdad.

Stone left Syria sanguine about its future. Restaurants and nightclubs filled with people at night, Syrians singing patriotic songs, dancing, and making ambitious plans to reconstruct their lives—all of this imbued him with a spirit of optimism about a country whose people continue to defy Western machinations to undermine their right to choose their own government, guide their economy in their own way, and choose their own future.

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