TERRORISM IN SYRIA AND BEYOND

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROF. ALAIN GABON

By Dr. Rahman Dag

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TERRORISM HAS BEEN A CONCEPT OF THE MODERN world since the French Revolution. Yet, there is no commonly accepted definition of it. Most recently, we have been witnessing extreme violence in Syria where different international and regional actors have their own definition of terrorism to legitimatize their military actions. So please let me start with a crucial question.

What do you think makes a group of people terrorist, is it the method used or their final target or their goal of challenging or breaking the status quo?

There is no universally accepted definition of terrorism, but there are at least two criteria shared by all existing definitions and you have mentioned them: 1) the

method: here, the intentional use of or the threat to use violence and/or fear (terrorists do precisely that, they terrorize or at least try to). Notice that one does not need to actually use force or violence, since creating a climate of fear is enough for fulfilling this first criteria of terrorism (the Cold War is not referred to as the "Balance of Terror" for no reason). And here, the terrorists have greatly benefited from the help of our own governments and media who for years have vastly exaggerated and overreacted to the terrorist threat, thus amplifying the fear effect those groups seek to produce 2) political goals, since terrorism is first of all politics (as opposed to using violence for purely personal, economic etc. purposes in cases like crimes of passion, mafia criminality, mass shootouts etc.): the goal of any terrorist is to change or on the contrary to preserve a larger existing order (since there are terrorists who seek to maintain, not necessarily challenge, the status quo), to influence a government, a group of people, etc. in order to achieve certain social or political objectives. In the most general sense of the term, terrorism can therefore be and often is defined as the use of force (military or other) and/or fear in order to reach certain political objectives. Notice that among many others, the U.S. government, for example in its 2003 invasion of Iraq and use of tactics aptly named Shock and Awe, fits that definition perfectly as much as ISIS or those European individuals who attack refugee centers in Germany or Sweden to frighten those immigrants and refugees in order to push

them to leave and deter others from coming. There are two other crucial criteria (so criteria 3 and 4) I have not mentioned but that make a huge difference. We'll talk about those two later, I'm sure.

Do you think that there is an international organization which is able to declare a group as terrorist, such as United Nation Security Council?

Do you mean there is or there should be such an international organization? If you mean whether there should be, yes and no. For me that would depend on what definition of terrorism that international organization would use to discriminate between terrorist versus legitimate entities. If the definition is sound, comprehensive and consistently applied, then it could be a factor of progress. But if that definition is—as is usually the case now with our governments, media, journalists, and major terrorism research centers—flawed, insufficient, partial, biased, ideologically oriented, misleading and even as is often the case deliberately manipulative, then this would be counterproductive and even dangerous, as has been the case with the whole discourse on terrorism and the "war on terror" itself.

Do you think that central governments' recognition of a group as a terrorist organization is adequate to consider that organization as a terrorist group?

No I absolutely do not. It is not because a government declares this or that group to be a terrorist organization that it is one.

Conversely, it is not because a certain group, certain individuals, certain entities including those central governments themselves have not been declared to be terrorists that they are not precisely that too. President Ronald Reagan, who supported, funded, and armed some of the most lethal, genocidal right-wing death squads throughout Central America in the name of the "fight against Communism" was and remains without a doubt a major transnational terrorist, one who powerfully and actively contributed to the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocents (indigenous peasant populations, etc.). Such facts, now widely known and amply documented, are no longer open to debate. President Clinton himself even formally admitted those atrocities and apologized to Guatemala on behalf of the U.S. State, so it's now official history. There are so many examples of why we should never rely on official governmental definitions of terrorism and why the deadliest terrorists are usually never those designated as such that one wouldn't even know where to start if we were to make that list. Starting with the U.S. state itself. If in doubt, ask the Native Americans (or what's left of them) since in their case, U.S. terrorism reached the scale and atrociousness of a veritable genocide, furthermore one of the worst and most complete in human history. What about indiscriminately and deliberately dropping atomic bombs on defenseless civilian Japanese populations and reducing them to ashes? One can hardly think of a purest example of terrorism than that! And yet, was the U.S. state ever declared to be a terrorist state? Hardly. Instead, we attach

that label to the Iranian regime, which itself, unlike the U.S., never nuked anyone. In their cynical and manipulative use of that word, our governments usually turn historical and contemporary reality on its head.

Another example: Saudi Arabia has recently officially declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group, but for other states like the E.U. the Muslim Brothers remain legit' (though feared and distrusted). Similarly, in Syria, the U.S. has been vigorously backing the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a militia led by the Kurdish-majority People's Protection Units (YPG), which Turkey considers to be a terrorist organization. So for Turkey, the U.S. is a sponsor of anti-Turkish terrorism. No wonder the relationship between the two countries have reached an all-time low! There are also plenty of groups and individuals who are terrorists according to the very definition of the states in which they operate, yet, curiously, they are not declared and judged as terrorists. In a recent article I examine that most disturbing phenomenon at work in the E.U. and the U.S. The case of, say, a Dylan Roof to name just one is a glaring example of a quintessential White Supremacist terrorist who committed what was clearly a terrorist massacre motivated by clear political goals (he killed nine African-American in their church "in order to provoke a racial war" as he himself declared), yet he was never prosecuted as a terrorist and was judged as a common murderer, even though that case fit perfectly the definition of terrorism of

the FBI and U.S. Department of Justice themselves! Imagine if it had been an Arab Muslim affiliated with Isis (Roof was a member of Southern White Supremacist groups) who would have killed nine white Christians in their church then claimed he did that to provoke a religious war. Would Mr. Comey have decided that was "not terrorism", as he did for Dylan Roof?

We need to be more aware of such double standard in the way our governments apply that word in a highly selective manner. To say nothing of their actual counter-terrorism policies, also applied selectively against certain terrorists but not others, as the few examples above (one could cite hundreds) are enough to prove. Besides, as academics and scholars, we should always maintain complete independence including intellectual, analytical and conceptual independence from what governments say or do. To put it bluntly we should not care. There is no reason to align ourselves on what Macron, Trump, May, Sisi, Assad or Mohammed ben Salman declare about such matters or about anything else, especially when all of those heads of states without exception (and many others) are either terrorists themselves or major sponsors of terrorist states, who speak from both corners on their mouths: flexing military muscles and talking tough about the "war on terror", while backing, funding, arming even worse terrorists or engaging in acts of terrorism themselves. Academics should never take their cues from those people, who have way too many vested interests in the manipulation of the word "terrorism" to be trusted.

In specific terms, there has been a common sense that ISIS is the most recent and violent terrorist organization in Syria, Iran and worldwide. Its so-called radical Islamic ideology is generalized to other Muslims and all Islamic organizations, regardless of whether they are armed or unarmed, have been regarded as the same as ISIS or at least suspected to be the same as ISIS. What is your comment on this?

It certainly is true that groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda have done enormous harm to Muslims around the world, not just because most of their victims are Muslims but also because they have enabled the Islamophobes and bigots of all stripes to portray their violence as a characteristic of Islam itself. The guilt-by-association, the generalization, the essentialization and demonization of Islam and all Muslims because of such groups, the extension of ISIS and Al Qaeda's violence to all Muslims has simply been devastating to otherwise peaceful and non-violent people. You can say that Muslims are twice the victims of such groups: first they are getting killed by them, then they are being associated with

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their own killers by the non-Muslims. However, ISIS is far, very far from being the most violent actor in Syria, the Middle East or the world contrary to what most people believe. And if we believe such falsehood, it is because the whole discourse on terrorism is polluted to its core. The most violent terrorist in all of Syria and the Middle East has been and remains President Assad himself, namely the Syrian government, not ISIS. The figures and body counts leave no doubt here. I have tried to explain in certain articles and essays how all those false popular perceptions, assumptions and misrepresentations have been created and consolidated by the deliberately manipulative and misleading semantic use of the word "terrorism" on the part of dominant groups (especially mainstream media, the terrorism industry, and politicians) for material interests (military budgets etc.) as well as ideological and political purposes.

As you know, during the Cold War, Marxist-Leninist/Communist organizations were considered as terrorist organizations, but now, coming from this same leftist root, PYD/YPG and PKK are regarded as heroes fighting against Islamic radicalism while certain Islamic/st groups are being demonized. From this perspective, do you think that these different approaches are actually related to a secular-religious dichotomy?

If I understand the question correctly, you seem to be pointing to a double standard at work in our governments, media, research centers, academics too (at least some of

them[1]), according to which leftist or non-religious or "secular" groups can never be terrorists, while that label is often exclusively applied to religious groups (the Islamic/ist kind of course) whether or not they actually are terrorists. In that case I would tend to agree, with some reservations. For example the PKK is officially considered to be a terrorist organization by both the U.S. and the E.U. yet despite their "tough on terror" talk, you don't really see any of those governments crack down hard on those organizations or their agents, representatives etc. in those countries (probably because they are considered low-level risks for countries like France). And that contrasts sharply with the determination with which those same governments crack down on religious "Islamist" terrorist groups and even sometimes on perfectly non-violent Islamic/ist groups and individuals as well (see the case of a Tariq Ramadan, routinely described in France as a "dangerous Islamist" who has been "radicalizing" the French Muslim youth, as somehow guilty too of that wave of recent Jihadist attacks targeting France https://www.milestonesjournal.net/articles/2018/3/19/the-tariq-ramadan-case-a-comprehensive-review)

Let's not even go into the debates about whether those we call "secular" are actually as secular as we think or as they claim they are (lately, Presidents Chirac, Sarkozy, Hollande, and Macron, in what is supposedly one of the most strictly secularist states of all, France, have abundantly violated the separation of church and state while claiming to uphold it). Or whether those we see as "religious" are really people of faith (frankly there's often little to no religiosity in so many "Islamist", "Jihadist", and/or "Salafist" terrorists). Or whether the distinction between "secularists" vs "religious" and "Islamists" is that clear and obvious. Not to mention the frequent confusion between "secularist" and "non-religious" or atheist while the two are absolutely not the same. Most Western Salafists (including those I personally know) can probably be considered to be secularists too in that they usually want to keep state and religion strictly separated, for example to protect their religion against governmental intrusion. Ironically, it's often the so-called secularists who insist on having the state decide what is religious or not (thus, in 2009, Sarkozy even declared to the French Parliament that niqabs and burqas were "not religious signs"!), what's a legitimate Islamic belief, how Muslims should organize themselves and so on and so forth, in blatant violation of the separation of church and state and freedom of religion. But an intellectual like Tariq Ramadan, who is always presented as a "radical Islamist" whose secret goal is to turn France into Saudi Arabia and impose "Shariah Law" in the West, is actually far more of a genuine secularist than his opponents, who use, instrumentalize, and pervert that word and principle ("secularism" or in a French context "laïcité") to violate the principle of separation of church and state and attack

Islam . What those pseudo-secularists like former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls have done is to weaponize "laïcité" to better attack the freedom of religion of their Muslim compatriots in the name of that noble and good principle. On this false dichotomy secular-religious in regards to Islam, see for example Franck Fregosi's "Islam in Laicity", a must-read.

So, when we examine things a bit more closely, this secular-religious dichotomy is never as clear-cut and strict as it seems, things are a lot more fuzzy and blurred, and the distinction often does not hold at all. Talking about recent developments following the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, John Voll (and most of the top scholars on this) observes *"there has been a religionization of what is called 'secular, and a secularization of what is called 'religious.' Increasingly, the so-called secular and the so-called religious are blending together in a new format that requires either new definitions or new terminology. To use an ugly neologism, the new modes of movements and state policies are increasingly 'seculigious.'"* In a nutshell, this religious/secular dichotomy, furthermore presented (at least in the West) as manichean, with "religious" (here "Islamic/ist") as the bad term and "secular", the good, positive, desirable, "enlightened" one, this conceptual framework is now too crude for describing the new realities. For journalists and politicians as well as for scholars of the Middle East and of Islam, it is increasingly bad methodology that can only lead to false interpretations of what has been happening. And if, unlike scholars, you actually have power, real power, and ground your decisions and foreign or domestic policies on falsehood, you are bound to create disasters for everybody including yourself even with the best intentions of the world—as has been the case for a long time with pretty much all Western governments one can think of.

Furthermore, in the new post-Arab Spring era, the main dynamic at work throughout the region is neither secular, nor religious, nor "seculigious". Events, developments, policies etc. are determined by none of that but by the brutal and desperate attempts of the governments and ruling oligarchies in place to stay in power, ensure regime survival, and kill any possibility of a resumption of the Arab Spring, which scared the hell out of them. If we don't understand that regime survival is what drives events now, we can't understand anything about MENA today. And to guarantee they will remain in power, those autocratic (at best), despotic, and tyrannical governments and rulers, Sisi, Assad, "MbS", "MbZ", Khamenei, "M6" the Moroccan King, etc., you name them, are ready to do anything it takes in the most pragmatic, non-ideological manner. And I mean anything. There is absolutely nothing they (at least most of them) will not do including killing half their own people if that is what it takes. See Assad and Sisi. In this post-ideological context where regime survival dominates everything else and where those apparently strong rulers and stable regimes actually feel vulnerable and threatened, those categories, "secular", "religious", "seculigious" etc. simply do not

matter, though some scholars would disagree and say I am downplaying the continued importance of competing ideologies, religious or not. But if they matter, it is just or mostly as policy tools, as convenient alibis, as rhetorical devices to manipulate their populations and try control the situation (e.g. the instrumentalization of religion by Sisi and MbS, the cynical politics of sectarianization, the deliberate exacerbation of the "Shiite-Sunni divide"—another lame cliché—by the Saudi, Iranian and other regimes, the use of sectarianism for counter-revolutionary and repressive purposes, the propaganda campaigns of Assad claiming Muslims want to massacre all Christians and he is their best protector, and so on and so forth).

What do you think about the claim that international public opinion has been witnessing 'the Islamization of war' in Syria?

Though groups like Jabhat Al-Nusra were actually present there since 2011, I think there is some truth to that, for example when Assad himself deliberately freed hundreds of Jihadists from his jails in order to inflame the situation hoping that would ultimately benefit him (he was successful at that) and allow him to present his regime as the lesser of two evils, the proverbial "bulwark against Jihadism" (a classic ploy that always works well with a largely Islamophobic West that has been rendered paranoid-hysterical by 9-11 and the few significant attacks that followed, like Charlie Hebdo and November 13). The

Islamization of the uprising, whose degree is hard to assess, has advanced in parallel with the militarization of what was initially a peaceful rebellion against Assad. But the situation today has evolved so much, for the worse, that it has hardly anything to do anymore with the popular, non-violent, non-Islamist uprising against a despotic regime that it was initially in its genuine Arab Spring early phase. Islamist and Jihadist groups of all sorts, usually backed by foreign powers, have greatly benefited from this evolution and to a large extent hijacked the uprising while marginalizing, some would say rendering obsolete, the democratic opposition.

But there's only some truth to that Islamization-of-the-Syrian conflict thesis, which might be more apparent than real. For example, those hyperactive Jihadist or Islamist groups are far from representing the totality of the opposition to Assad's regime, which has been highly fragmented and ineffective, including the democratic non-violent organizations who tragically have been spending so much of their time and energy opposing each other, to the joy of Assad and his divide-and-conquer strategy. As a matter of fact, most of the Assad opponents are not "Islamists" or Jihadists. Furthermore, the motivations of the "Jihadist" fighters themselves are often not as religious as we think even when they themselves declare to be acting for Islam. Despite the claims of some "experts", what's happening in Syria is still not a religious war and is best described as a civil war or rather a series of civil wars with a

heavy foreign dimension, since it often seems half of the world including the U.S., Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, France etc. are fighting there both directly and by proxy (at least they try), thus prolonging the conflict to devastating effects for those caught in that abominable crossfire. Syria has become like a sort of World War concentrated in one small country with a population of 23 million (well, in 2011.)

Regarding that Islamization problematics, there may be similarities with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There too, what was essentially a territorial and political problem (two people claiming right to the same land) has recently acquired a more religious dimension or religious emphasis on both sides (just listen to PM Netanyahu use religious language in his foreign policy speeches). Yet, that conflict can still not be described as religious in origin and nature (a clash between Islam and Judaism, etc.). But in both cases, the religious element has become more pronounced, I think as a result of the deadlock and subsequent radicalization of those involved. It's very clear in Israel, where the fanaticized Jewish Absolutists (most of the "settlers", who, as colonizers, are actually international war

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criminals too by international law, and repulsive racists cum mass murderers in the Israeli government such as Defense Minister Avigdor Liebermann) have gained the upper hand and laminated the left. However I think what I was explaining above regarding this new "secularreligiousness" in the making in the post-Arab Spring era could apply here too. This being said, the main dynamic in the Syrian conflict has not been its Islamization but its internationalization through foreign interventions, especially the terrible supply of arms by all those foreign powers from France to Russia, Turkey or the U.S., a phenomena which itself is really not motivated by religion. Plus what really matters is not whether you are Muslim, Druze, Alawite, Christian, etc. but whether you are an Assad opponent or supporter. Finally, many analysts have explained that even in cases where religious identities are explicitly invoked in a sectarian manner, such identities and religious affiliations mostly offer a convenient and legitimate alibi to advance interests or push for agendas that are themselves non-religious. Merve Gunenc for example, following certain scholars on this, argues that in such cases, "religion is the 'shell' of the conflict while socio-economic inequality is its 'core'… So, in conflicts such as the Syrian civil war, divisions seem to be on religious fault lines, when in actual fact they are more significantly class identities and class tensions. Inter-religious tensions therefore do exist but are more of a disguise or "shell" for the socioeconomic issues which are a key underlying driving force of the Syrian civil war."

On the other hand, we have the concept of 'state terrorism'. Do you think that the Syrian government's reactions since the beginning of the crisis qualifies as state terrorism?

There you go, that was one of the other two crucial criteria I was alluding to regarding your very first question, one that changes everything and whose occlusion has created extreme distortions and falsehood in our dominant discourses, assumptions and representations of "terrorism". For that reason, those are heavily biased, skewed, unreliable and misleading. There is no question the Syrian government's ultra-violent suppression of the opposition, from the first peaceful demonstrations of the 2011 Arab Spring to the insurrection by armed groups constitute quintessential state terrorism of the worst, most lethal kind, like in the case of the regime's indiscriminate bombing of entire neighborhoods. I don't think anyone could question that with a straight face. The main bias that pollutes the whole discourse on terrorism as well as our supposedly "counter-terrorism" policies is the deliberate omission of state terrorism from our considerations. One cannot think of a worse distortion in the picture of terrorism worldwide that we project by doing so, since state terrorism now and then has always been by far the most lethal type of all, one that makes the likes of Al Qaeda look like amateurs. Just think Hitler and the Third Reich. And today more than ever, the worst, bloodiest and most lethal terrorists remain heads of states and

governments, not non-state actors: In Syria, Assad. In Egypt, Sisi. In Yemen, Mohammed bin Salman. In Israel, Netanyahu, the Jewish settlers, and the IDF, whose record of terroristic exactions, atrocities and war crimes is at this point well known, abundantly filmed and disseminated globally on social media, not to mention exposed and documented by all human rights groups including the Israeli ones like B'Tselem and by hundreds of IDF soldiers themselves. Just those four top officials have killed and hurt far more civilians than Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and Isis *combined* ever did and ever will even if you take the totality of their casualties worldwide.

Let's not even mention all those other governments and foreign heads of states who support, arm, and fund the former group (Macron, Hollande, May, Merkel, Obama, Trump, etc.) and therefore fully deserve to be exposed, too, as the sponsors, bankers, and arms dealers of state terrorists they are, for a fact. Yet, observe how they are systematically exonerated from the "terrorism" label. If you, yourself, were to give a gun to a (non-state) terrorist without even knowing what he was planning to do with it, that would be enough to send you to jail for a decade or two. But when the above-mentioned rulers sell billions of weaponry to confirmed mass murderers like bin Salman and Sisi, in full knowledge they are going to use them against civilian populations (their own or that of foreign countries—and they know that because that is what has been

happening all along), then, suddenly, it's no longer a crime but business and diplomacy.

Then and now, as every scholar of terrorism knows well (no need to be a scholar though, History past and present provides enough irrefutable examples from Stalin to Hitler, Pol Pot, Pinochet , Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Saddam Hussein and so on and so forth), the most dangerous, determined, and murderous of all terrorists have always been ruling governmental elites and heads of states, not the little guys like Action Directe, Carlos or Al Qaeda. Though I personally would not want Isis in my backyard, those are just the underdogs. But our media and politicians have very effectively constructed them as our main existential threat, to better cover up and divert our attention from *their* own, far worse war crimes and terroristic policies. And in that, quite sadly, they have been powerfully helped (intentionally or not) by many academics and research centers. Take the typical case of the Global Terrorism Database (GTB) at the University of Maryland, probably the main and most influential of all research centers on terrorism, because they are used as the top reference and source by mainstream media, governments, and many other researchers. Though they claim on every page of their web site to be "the most comprehensive database on terrorist attacks in the world" , in reality they are counting only non-state terrorist attacks while superbly ignore state terrorism altogether. Not their problem. (Since until very recently they were funded by the U.S. State Dept. and Homeland Security, which is also one of their main clients, this "methodological choice" is hardly surprising. You can't really imagine their "researchers" reporting about U.S.-backed state terrorists like bin Salman and Sisi!) But as a result, the image, the understanding, the representation of "global terrorism" those research centers and academics produce, disseminate and project both directly and through those (journalists etc.) who quote them uncritically, is completely false and fraudulent, since it purely and simply excludes from the picture the biggest terrorists of all and their victims, who are in far greater numbers than those of the likes of Al Qaeda. This being said, Trump apparently just cut off their funding, and I believe it is actually a good thing, as such "research centers" probably do more harm than good given the way they are constructing and consolidating a false and fraudulent picture and understanding of global terrorism as exclusively a non-state phenomena. In some cases such as this one, no research is better than bad, biased, flawed, misleading and methodologically and conceptually polluted research. As far as I am concerned and though I have been using their data too (which is excellent for non-state terrorism), the GTB can go, and be replaced by other centers who will have more methodological and conceptual integrity and will ALSO include state terrorism, thus producing a better, more inclusive picture and a more exact understanding of global terrorism today.

Regarding current political violence, do you think that violation of basic human rights

would justify using terrorism as a way of struggle against oppressive states?

If our definition of terrorism implies deliberately targeting defenseless, non-combatant civilians, then no. Nothing can possibly justify that, ever, not even self-defense (as when for example Israel exterminates 29 members of an extended family children and babies included by bombing their apartment building then claims a "Hamas terrorist" was hiding among them so it was "self-defense"). It is fundamental for those genuinely committed to fighting terrorism not to use similar methods and commit similar crimes. But terrorism can also target exclusively armed combatants (it can be used to frighten or target enemy soldiers). Then it becomes an altogether different phenomena, which in other contexts we simply call "resistance". Let's remember that when they were attacking German soldiers or their military and civilian infrastructures (blowing up trains etc.), the French Resistants during WW2 were terrorists too according to some definitions ("use of force to achieve political goals" etc.) The method (violence, scare, guerilla warfare against an occupying force) and the political goals are still there, but the crucial dimension of targeting civilians, something most people spontaneously and rightly associate with "terrorism", is no longer present. Furthermore, in that particular configuration or definition (the use of violence exclusively against armed enemy combatants to achieve political goals), what you observe is that most governments out there including France, the U.S. Britain etc. are actually terrorists

themselves (e.g. bombarding the Islamic State, invading Iraq to accomplish regime change, the 2011 NATO operation in Libya, and so on.) That is why I believe it is essential to include the targeting of unarmed and defenseless civilians as a criteria in our definitions and understandings of terrorism. I know some disagree with that and reject that criteria, but then, like I said, everybody is a terrorist sooner or later since most governments use force to achieve political goals and then the word no longer means anything, since it applies to so many entities out there including most governments engaged in the "war on terror" through bombing campaigns and all. So, to complete my initial response, whether or not one uses violence against civilians too vs. using force exclusively against armed enemy combatants is what may enable us to draw the line between a legitimate use of violence and terror (for example in a situation of military occupation) versus an illegitimate, "terroristic" use of such methods.

What are your final comments on Syrian Crisis in terms of terror and terrorism?

Contrary to a critic whose name I forgot but who claimed that after years of horrific fighting and massacres, a pro-Western, pro-U.S., moderate and democratic Syrian fighter is as common there as pink fluffy unicorns, the vast majority of the Syrian population including the Assad opponents remain committed to peace, non-violence, and a harmonious, all-inclusive national future. That is what most people still

desperately want and it gives some hope. But given they are tragically not those who currently control the situation and have the upper hand (right now it's the butcher Assad and his Iranian and Russian allies who do own the place, namely Syria's worst terrorists), I am not optimistic for a conflict resolution in the next few years. The best one can hope for right now is a cease fire. But even that doesn't seem on the near horizon. And if a solution is to be found that would at least end the violence for the sake of the civilians (a very limited goal), it will have to include the worst terrorist in all of the Middle East: Assad himself, who will definitely want to see his power, his future and that of his allies guaranteed.

Notes:

1. For a good example check here how despite its claims to study "radicalization and political violence", the prestigious International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) at King's College, London, is actually all (or mostly) about "Islamist" terrorism, "Jihadism" etc. in its highly selective and, to put a positive spin on this, "focused" examination of "political violence" and radicalization. The lack of interest, the paucity of the research, and the blindness towards forms of radicalization and political violence other than "Jihadist" ones including the Christian, leftist, nationalist, right-wing, White Supremacist etc. kinds is just astounding. Of course, the same critiques have been addressed, and

rightfully so, to President Obama's CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) initiative. This quasi exclusive bias that consists in considering that "terrorism" is essentially a Muslim problem and a threat that comes from Muslims-only is even more surprising in Europe, given the fact that right-wing radicalization there has been dramatically escalating and spreading for decades now (e.g. the resurgence of neo-nazi groups even in Germany, the electoral successes, everywhere, of racist and islamophobic nationalist populist parties, the proliferation everywhere of violent, racist, often paramilitary groups like Greece's Golden Dawn or the English Defense League, not to mention the Russian nationalists, among the worst, and so on.) And yet, it still seems that in the world of those "researchers", only a Muslim can be a "violent extremist". One has to question what exactly is the nature, the origin, the funding, the politics, the purpose, and above all the consequences for some (Muslims, refugees, etc.) of such "research on radicalization", which in most cases doesn't even seem bothered by the fact that today, in the U.S.A, we are seeing demonstrations of proudly racist White Supremacist groups chanting slogans like "Jews will not replace us!". Not to mention of course the election of a Donald Trump, with Steven Bannon as his special advisor at the White House not so long ago.