

VOICES for PEACE in SYRIA



Young adults in Damascus, Syria / photo Eva Bartlett

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A PERSONAL MESSAGE TO CONGRESS FROM LILLY MARTIN



Hello. My name is Lilly Martin. I am an American citizen living permanently in Latakia, Syria. I am from Fresno, California and have been here in Syria with my family for about 20 years.

I have seen the Syria crisis from the beginning. It is not a popular uprising or revolution; the truth is that *is a foreign funded, foreign engineered attack on the Syrian government and people.*

Recently the small Armenian village of Kessab was attacked and occupied. Many buildings were destroyed and it is still occupied. Kessab is on the border with Turkey, one hour drive from Latakia. The Armenian villagers are the descendants of the remnants of the Turkish Ottoman genocide on Armenians in 1915. The village has now been over-run by foreign terrorists. It was not Syrian rebels who entered into Kessab and occupied it.

I have a summer home there because Kessab is up in the mountains and it's cool in summer. My home is among those destroyed. The residents of Kessab that were not killed in the initial invasion have come down to Latakia and are staying at the Armenian Cultural Center and Church. Some died and some are still missing from the invasion of Kessab.

I am from Fresno California and that's the home of 60,000 Armenians, one of the largest concentrations of Armenians outside Armenia itself. Those people are also survivors of the Turkish Ottoman genocide which killed 1.5 million Armenians in 1915 and was the first genocide of the century. So I know who Armenians are and how they have suffered. Now they are suffering again. The terrorists who came in are from many foreign countries and they are being supported and aided by the government of Turkey.

I would like to make a personal appeal to the American people. Please understand that you are not getting an accurate story in the media about Syria.

In reality this is a foreign funded and foreign organized attack. It is not a civil war and it is not a sectarian war though it has aspects of that. It is primarily something that is coming from outside the country. They are not just attacking the government or the military; they are attacking the people.

AMERICAN EYE WITNESS TO MURDER

Rick Sterling

I was one of two Americans on the international peace delegation to Syria. We were eye-witnesses to the consequences of terrorism in both Damascus and Homs.

DAMASCUS

The mortar blast shook the hotel building where the International Peace Delegation was staying at 7:30 am on Palm Sunday April 13 2014.

We looked out our hotel room balcony and could see smoke rising from the street and



Mortar landed behind tennis court back fence.

sidewalk just below. A soldier who had been manning a checkpoint on the roadway was being carried away, looking badly injured. Cars on the roadway had come to a stop. We went down to see and saw two cars destroyed by shrapnel. We later learned that three civilians in the vehicles died.

By providing training and allowing US armaments to be delivered to the “rebels”, we are contributing to this terrorism. What kind of “freedom” and “democracy” is this? Why are my taxes being used to fund terrorism?



Car Hit by Mortar Shrapnel, Passengers killed.



Fresh blood on the sidewalk outside our hotel in Damascus. One soldier and three civilians killed.

HOMS

On Saturday afternoon April 12, 2014 we visited the city of Homs. We met the mayor and religious leaders in the city and heard about the advances of the Reconciliation Movement. We also visited the site of a recent car bomb attack in which 25 local residents were killed. It was a normal neighborhood with no military presence.



Buildings in Homs Destroyed by car bomb.



Rick Sterling with family in Homs whose house was blown apart. The youths' grandmother and aunt were killed in the mid-day attack. Their question: Why is USA supporting terrorism?

DOES THE CIA CONTROL HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE POLICY ON SYRIA?

Rick Sterling

On Friday May 2, I phoned the House Foreign Affairs Committee to tell them about my experiences and observations in Syria with the International Peace Pilgrimage led by Nobel Laureate Mairead Maguire. I also wanted to express concern regarding Congressional resolutions regarding Syria.

I was informed that Evan McMullin is the lead staff person on Syria for Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce and then connected with him.

My conversation with Mr. McMullin was very unpleasant. When I told him about my conversations in Syria and how most of the public there seems to strongly support the government, he called me names in a threatening and almost bullying manner. Mr McMullin told me that he has frequent conversations with Syrians and that he has traveled "all over" Syria. Out of curiosity, I asked him when and where, at which point he became even more aggressive and arrogant while refusing to respond to the simple questions.

According to his public biography, Mr. McMullin previously worked for the CIA National Clandestine Service. Is it appropriate that someone with this background should be the senior advisor to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on such an important issue? Is his perspective clear and objective or is it skewed by the long history of clandestine work and failed CIA analysis and information regarding Iraq? Why is he so defensive about what he did? What is there to hide?

Mr McMullin's trip, including exorbitant transportation expenses, was paid by the public, not the CIA. If the goal is genuinely to promote democracy, shouldn't we be honestly evaluating the real sentiment of all Syrians? Or are we continuing the failed policies of "regime change" against governments we don't like, regardless of the sentiment of the population?

From Evan McMullin's bio:

"Mr. McMullin serves as the Senior Advisor to the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs Prior to his current role, he spent more than a decade working on related issues in the Middle East, Asia and Africa for the Central Intelligence Agency's National Clandestine Service."

Voices of Syrians

GOVERNOR OF HOMS PROVINCE



“I believe dialog is the only way out of this crisis.”

Governor of Homs (center of photograph). To his right is Irish Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Mairead Maguire. To his left is Syrian-British heart surgeon Dr. Ahmed Khaddour.

NEIGHBORHOOD BOYS IN HOMS



Boys in Homs in Homs neighborhood where two car bombs exploded the previous week, killing 25.

Boy on left speaks in Arabic while boy on right translates to English. (4.12.2014)

“Two car bombs have been sent here and twenty five persons killed. Why???”

My ancestors come from the Iskanderun area of Turkey. Erdogan wants this terrorism, but the Turkish people and the Syrian people are together, like one body. The Turkish people are with the Syrian people not with Erdogan’s terrorism!”

Young Adults in Damascus



Excerpts from Interview in Damascus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3GdFcagzXo>

BLUE SCARF: *Life in Syria is OK but I am sad for Syria now.*

MAN: *The situation is improving. Before, life was quite difficult but now its getting better..... for the future I want to stop the killings.*

WHITE SCARF : *We want our country to return to how it was before. We want to return to living a normal life, as we used to, with security. We don't want anything other than security.*

MAN: *And we want to stop these groups of terrorists and rebels. We want the terrorist rebels to leave and our country to return to how it was.*

WHITE SCARF: *Under Bashar Al Assad, life was evolving. We were living in safety. Now their revolution has destroyed us. We have no safety. We used to live in freedom, now we're restricted. There's no freedom.*

We've become afraid to leave our houses..... afraid that the terrorists will come out on the streets.

Before we used to stay out till 3 am. Nobody asked us where we were going. We'd go out, this group. Now, no way, we only go out during the day.

MAN: *But the situation is improving now (thanks to Bashar).*

BLUE SCARF: *We love Bashar. Why? Because he's truly a good person. We know what he has done to improve the country. Before all of this started, we were living better. We all know that. Now, everything is worse.*

YOUNG MAN: *This "revolution" has sent us backwards. Now our situation is improving and of course we are with Dr. Bashar Assad. And we hope our situation will (continue to) improve.*

Syrian American in Latakia



I am Steven Sahiounie., an American citizen and college student here in Syria. I have lived through the crisis, the three years coming on four years. This is not a revolution. There are civilians being killed, innocents killed in cold blood. Some were cut up into pieces. Some were killed and their flesh eaten. We have seen terrorists coming in and killing our relatives, our friends, our neighbors.

*My message to the American people is that you are not getting the truth. Please call Congress and demand the American government **STOP FUNDING TERRORISTS WHO ARE KILLING MY NEIGHBORS!***

Syrian Refugees in Al Faydah Camp, Lebanon



“We want the conflict to end so we can go home.”

Internally Displaced Children from Yarmouk



What do they want?

DUTCH PRIEST TRAGICALLY KILLED IN HOMS JUST BEFORE CEASEFIRE



Father Frans van der Lugt was murdered in front of his church in early April 2014. Father Frans was a Jesuit Priest who came to Syria in 1966. He was widely respected for his dedication and commitment to the well being of Muslims and Christians alike.

Report from Father van der Lugt on the Situation in Homs / 13 January 2012

We owe it to the citizens of Syria to be nuanced. Otherwise, their struggle is lost.

There are many people here that sincerely believe that we can go further with this [i.e. the current Syrian] government, that it is capable of implementing reforms (see the president's latest speech) and that it is perhaps more democratic than possible replacements.

Most of the citizens of Syria do not support the opposition. Even a country like Qatar has stated this following an opinion survey. Therefore, you also cannot say that this is a popular uprising. The majority of people are not part of the rebellion and certainly not part of the armed rebellion. What is occurring is, above all, a struggle between the army and armed Sunni groups that aim to overturn the Alawite regime and take power.

From the start the protest movements were not purely peaceful. From the start I saw armed demonstrators marching along in the protests, who began to shoot at the police first. Very often the violence of the security forces has been a reaction to the brutal violence of the armed rebels.

It is not sure that the government is playing off the two groups (Sunnis and Alawites) against one another. In Homs, it is precisely the opposite. The army is keeping the two groups from getting involved in a bloody conflict. If the army leaves, then we will have a civil war here in Homs.

Bashar al-Assad has never required the support of Christian leaders. Most support him because they are convinced that they would be worse off with another solution.

WHY THE SYRIAN REBELLION MAY COLLAPSE LIKE A HOUSE OF CARDS

By Father Dave Smith, the Boxing Priest from Australia

<http://prayersforsyria.com/why-the-syrian-rebellion-may-collapse-like-a-house-of-cards/>

I have just returned from Syria. Over the space of a couple of days our group drove from Damascus to Lattakia to Homs and back to Damascus – all without harassment or signs of imminent violence. The contrast with my last trip – almost exactly a year earlier – could not have been greater!

Last year Damascus seemed under siege. The red glow of mortar fire filled the horizon every night and when members of our delegation tried to leave town in the direction of Homs their car was fired upon. A year ago the mood everywhere was tense and fearful, but now the Syrian people seemed to have a new strength and confidence. The battle was nearly over, and Syria was going to win!

This is certainly how the Syrians we met perceived the war. They don't see it as a *civil* war at all. They see a foreign invasion, led by the US and its client states – Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Israel and Turkey. As Syria enters its fourth year of bloody conflict and as the number of actual Syrians in the anti-Assad alliance becomes an increasingly small percentage, this interpretation looks increasingly compelling.

Of course our delegation included a good number of us '*Westerners*' which made things uncomfortable at times! "*Why do you want to destroy us?*" people asked. Why indeed?

Thankfully most of those who asked such questions were also wise enough to realise that we were in Syria precisely because we did not accept the official narrative of the Western media – that the rebels are Robin Hood and his merry men trying to topple the

evil prince. We recognised that the war in Syria had far more complex causes, rooted in the economic threat posed by Iran to the other main players in the region.

Note that I speak of Iran's '*economic threat*' and not '*existential threat*'. Despite all rhetoric to the contrary, this war has always been about nothing more than money. It's a battle between business magnates who seek to control oil and gas flow across the region. The Syrian people are simply the cannon-fodder who pay the price of corporate greed.

Of course the average Syrian doesn't understand all this and neither is the average Syrian interested in issues of global hegemony. She just wants to get on with her life and bring up her family in an environment that is stable and secure. The Syrian people are sick of the violence. Even those with a passion for political reform recognise that nothing constructive can happen until the violence ceases. And this is why the people cling to Bashar Al-Assad even if they don't particularly love the man. He offers a return to normalcy and peace whereas his takfiri opponents offer only a return to the Caliphate!

Syrians want peace, and the religion of the takfiri has never had any place in Syrian culture, and this is why the whole rebellion could collapse any day like a house of cards! I appreciate that analysts everywhere are saying that there is no end in sight for the conflict and that it could drag on for years to come but this is because they focus on logistics and on the policies of the foreign interventionists. What they fail to take into account is the strength of the resolve of the Syrian people!

The Syrians are a proud people. They don't want to be controlled by foreign empires and they don't want their culture of pluralism and religious tolerance destroyed. Whatever problems Syrians might have with the Assad government, it is their independence and way of life that is at stake in this conflict and so it is only a matter of time before Syrians of all political persuasions join hands to push out the foreign invaders!

This process is already well underway. We met a *Sheikh Tahhan* in Lattakia who is a much sought-after man by members of the *Free Syrian Army* (FSA) in Homs. He is the go-to guy for those who want to take advantage of the government's armistice – guaranteeing protection from prosecution to those who will hand over their arms! There were FSA fighters trickling into the peace camp like this when I was in Damascus last year. Now that trickle has become a steady flow!



Sheikh Tahhan with Mother Agnes Mariam and a former FSA fighter

The Sheikh had three former-fighters with him when he met us, each of whom seemed very happy to be out of the fight. Tahhan's report though was more encouraging still - that the entire FSA garrison in Homs might be on the verge of laying down their arms! If this happens it will doubtless start a chain-reaction. Syrian rebels everywhere will abandon their foreign-led battalions and come

back to their families, and once this happens the end will come quickly.

Of course on paper the forces of *Jabhat Al Nusra* and *ISIS* and the other foreign jihadists could still put up a fight for years to come, but once the Syrian people unite the writing will be on the wall and these takfiri will lose their financial backers. Once the money dries up the violence will stop.

For it is the bottom line that is the bottom line in the Syrian conflict. In the end it is all about money and so it can only last so long as foreign investors are willing to pour their cash into it. Once Syrians unite to throw out the takfiri the whole venture will start to look like a very poor investment and so the rebellion will collapse like a house of cards!

My hope and prayer is that this will happen within months, maybe even within weeks! Certainly I don't expect to see another year end with jihadists decorating trees with the severed heads of Christians in mock celebration of Christmas. The strength and resolve of the Syrian people will not allow this sort of barbarity to subsume their culture. A ceasefire is on the horizon, after which will begin the more lengthy process of national reconciliation.

Father Dave

member of the 2014 International Pilgrimage of Peace to Syria



Father Dave with refugees from Yarmouk (Damascus, April 2014)

SYRIA WOLVES OF THE VALLEY

Produced by Vice News / Journalist and narrator Aris Roussinos / 25 minutes.

NEW VIDEO REVIEW

“Most of the commanders actually live in Turkey and commute in to the fighting when necessary.”

“SYRIA: Wolves of the Valley” was filmed in March 2014 and shows scenes from Darkush, Syria at the border with Turkey. The video shows fighters from the “Syrian Revolutionary Forces” taking over villages previously controlled by ISIS.

The video begins with the film-maker and rebels crossing the Orontes River. “This river is the border between Syria and Turkey..... This is an unofficial border crossing. It’s tolerated by the Turkish authorities. There is a constant flow of refugees and smuggled fuel over to Turkey. There are fighters going across both ways. Most of the commanders actually live in Turkey and commute into the fighting when necessary.”

How would we like it if Canada was harboring and facilitating terrorists who “commuted” in to launch terror attacks in the US?

The video includes testimony that the US is training and supplying lethal military equipment to these “rebels”. One curious thing in the video is that there are no credible scenes of fighting and the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham) banners are still flying. One fighter they pass is even carrying an ISIS flag (see photo below).

Another curiosity is that there are no interviews with civilians to document conditions under ISIS or the new rebel masters. Why? Soon after this video was filmed, other rebels attacked the nearby Syrian Armenian village of Kessab. Reports indicated that Turkish soldiers facilitated the invasion which continues to this day (May 2014). Some of the villagers were killed; most escaped by foot or vehicle to the city of Latakia. What kind of “freedom” and “liberation” is this where all the residents flee in terror? Why are our tax dollars being used to arm and train these “wolves of the valley”?



MESSAGE TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE FROM MOTHER AGNES MARIAM



Mother Agnes Mariam is Mother Superior at St James Monastery in Qara, Syria. She is a leader in the Mussalaha (Reconciliation) Movement which has arranged for ceasefires in the conflict between armed rebels and Syrian government forces. She made the following appeal while visiting the SF Bay Area at the invitation of St. Mary's College in Orinda, California.

May 3, 2014, California

Since my childhood I have known that the United States is a great nation and the American People are essentially good people. We love you. We honor you. We respect your achievements in the social and scientific realm.

We urge the American People to be more aware about some politics that affect your credibility worldwide. We need your leadership in the struggle for peace. We need you to look beyond the manipulation and misinformation.

We have been living a terrible fate and tragedy in the Middle East. I will give you a small example of what could be your own life in our countries. My father had to leave Palestine in a hurry in 1948. And he has never been permitted to go back – neither he nor my grandmother nor all my uncles. So he lived all his life as a refugee in Lebanon. So I am the daughter of a refugee father. He met my mother in Lebanon. Just after this we had to face the split of Cypress and the terrible conflict in Lebanon which lasts until today. Meanwhile we had the Islamic revolution and then the war between Iraq and Iran. Then began the big problems in the Gulf, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Iraq with all that meant: people being killed and countries being devastated.

Then began the so called “Arab Spring”. Syria is the last country where this “Arabic Spring” began. You may think that what happened there is for freedom and democracy. Today we can tell you that this revolution has been hijacked by extremists and fundamentalists led by Al Queda. What we do not understand is why some of your leaders are sometimes helping Al Queda under the banner of helping the Syrian revolution.

We ask your support for a peaceful solution based on dialog between Syrians inside Syria. This will open the door to forgiveness and real reconciliation. This is what the American people can do. This is what American decision makers can do. This is the way to end a tragedy.

AMERICANS SPEAKING OUT FOR PEACE AND AGAINST TERRORISM IN SYRIA



In contrast with biased information from lobby groups such as the “Syrian American Council”, the majority of Syrians support the Damascus government over the ‘rebels’. That has been confirmed by numerous polls including from Doha and NATO contractor. Skeptical? Check it for yourself. Syrian Americans largely feel the same way, as shown in the photos above.

<http://www.thedohadebates.com/news/item/index.asp?n=14312>

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jan/17/syrians-support-assad-western-propaganda>

<http://www.worldtribune.com/2013/05/31/nato-data-assad-winning-the-war-for-syrians-hearts-and-minds/>

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