

As British War Rhetoric Escalates, the Syrians Mobilize for Victory and Reconstruction

by Odile Mojon and Ulf Sandmark

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Sept. 16—As lying allegations saturate the news media in Europe and the United States that the government of Syria is preparing a chemical weapons attack on its own people, a European Schiller Institute delegation has just returned from an extended visit to that nation. Our report of that visit hopefully provides a welcome and compelling dose of truth as to the current situation inside Syria, including the urgent need to complete Syria's war of liberation and defeat the last vestiges of barbaric terrorism which targeted that nation. We want to shine a light on the heroism of the Syrian people, who not only defeated the terrorist assault, but are now reclaiming and rebuilding their cities, towns, and villages.

Our Schiller Institute delegation—as well as other delegations of journalists from India, Russia, China, Japan, Czechia, Spain, and elsewhere—was invited by the Ministry of Tourism to visit the 60th Damascus International Fair taking place September 6-15. The fair was an impressive show of Syrian industrial know-how, covering the broad spectrum of Syria's industrial capabilities. Many of the participants in the fair reported on the devastating damage that has resulted from the war.



Odile Mojon

Reconstruction is the focus now in Syria. Already next month, the 60th Damascus International Fair will be followed up with the Rebuild Syria Fair. Here Ahmad Al-Madi, Marketing Director of the fair, describes to Ulf Sandmark (right) the great international interest in Syrian reconstruction.

But they also talked about the relocation, rebuilding, and restarting of production that are now going on around the clock. This year, 48 nations participated in this fair, many of them from the old Silk Road nations, bringing Syria back into position as an important hub in the China-led Belt and Road Initiative. Several Syrian government delegations have recently visited China, India, Russia and Iran, and the New Silk Road is now part of Syria's economic policy.

At the fair, Sandmark was invited by one of the main Syrian TV channels to participate in a fifty-minute, on-air discussion on eco-



Ulf Sandmark

The domestically produced equipment used to rebuild the Syrian gas pipeline system was displayed in the Syrian pavilion of the 60th Damascus International Fair.



Ulf Sandmark.

The view northwards from the Aleppo citadel over areas of East Aleppo formerly held by terrorists. Standing houses indicate that the fighting was done on the ground, and only partially supported from the air, which would have flattened the buildings.

conomic policy. Sandmark pointed to the importance of the fair as a celebration of the New Silk Road and told of the work of the Schiller Institute, and Lyndon and Helga LaRouche, in promoting it. The [EIR Special Report](#), titled *The New Silk Road Becomes the World Land-Bridge*, in its Arabic translation, was shown to the TV audience.

In the ensuing discussion on the lack of money for reconstruction, Sandmark countered the constant over-emphasis on foreign investments, pointing instead to the use of public credit by, for example, American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the reconstruction of South Korea and Germany after World War II, as well as in FDR's own New Deal.

He also pointed to the sovereign right of Syria to protect its domestic industry and agriculture, as it is urgently needed to reclaim and resettle the territories liberated by the Syrian Arab Army from the terrorists. He emphasized that everyone must respect Syria's need to continue its war economy to protect its own physical productive capacity.

In all, Sandmark delivered two on-air television interviews with the two leading Syrian national stations. In those interviews, he, like Virginia State Senator Richard Black, protested against the threat of British, U.S., and French aggression against Syria, under the pretext of a staged,

fake chemical attack in Idlib province to be blamed on President Assad. Sandmark reported on the international Schiller Institute mobilization, the statements by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, and the call-ins to the White House from all over the United States asking President Trump to fire anyone who is pushing for this new attack against Syria.

Inside Syria

The delegation visited the capital, Damascus, and the cities of Homs, Aleppo and Palmyra. Traveling the roads is now safe. Except for Palmyra, these cities have major areas that have been under government control throughout the war and are fully functioning—busy cities with lots of traffic and people in the streets.



Ulf Sandmark

The terribly damaged old city area of Aleppo, intentionally destroyed by the terrorists, is under reconstruction. Streets have been cleared and repaired.



Ulf Sandmark

The delegation gathered at the Damascus Old Town Gate Bab Touma, about to start traveling around Syria with the guide, Professor Mahmoud Aboura (left); Odile Mojon (center), and Ulf Sandmark (right).

The exception is the city of Palmyra, which is almost empty with nowhere to stay or eat. It is still under military supervision and special permission is required to go there. In Damascus, most checkpoints seen last year have been withdrawn, as all terrorist-controlled areas have been recaptured. The city can now breathe again, after living in fear for seven years of random

grenade attacks from the terrorists. One of the guides stated that during those seven years, people had lived *de facto* in a prison, fearing leaving their homes.

Once one leaves the inner city, however, and arrives at the outskirts of Damascus, the devastation seen in the newly liberated, former terrorist-controlled areas is shocking. This is also true in large parts of Homs and in Eastern Aleppo. Most houses were terribly damaged. As the houses were not flattened, they clearly had not been bombed by airplanes, but instead were destroyed by ground fighting and by terrorists going door to door, burning shop after shop, all around the houses.

Everywhere the rubble was pushed aside on the bigger streets, and the asphalt repaired. All destroyed military equipment has been removed. Reconstruction is going on in stages.

In the areas liberated within the last one or two years, most houses have ongoing reconstruction of new floors and walls, and lights were seen in some windows. In desert areas many, many villages were depopulated, but some of them have now reached a threshold of infrastructure sufficient for former residents to move back and start working the fields.

The main effort has been to restore the basic infra-



Photos: Ulf Sandmark

Basic infrastructure is a priority. The refinery in Homs (left), one of three in Syria, is in full production. The power lines have been restored, and are now also exporting electric power to Lebanon.

structure. Damascus now has electric power 24/7, after years of controlled, rolling blackouts. The oil refinery in Homs is back in operation, but still producing enough only for domestic consumption. The big fertilizer plant, also in Homs, is now producing 70 percent of the national demand. Most gas pipelines have been rebuilt, almost entirely using nationally produced equipment. The primary oil pipeline to Homs has clearly not been rebuilt, as the road into the desert was filled by endless lines of oil trucks. Long stretches of new, straight roads were built and covered with asphalt to make this “pipeline on wheels” possible.



Odile Mojon

The Souk (Bazaar) in the Old City of Damascus was fully functioning as shown here, throughout the war. After the terrorists had been eliminated throughout region, most military checkpoints inside in this Souk were withdrawn, to the great relief of shoppers, who no longer risked grenades being thrown in the Souk.

Aleppo

The Schiller Institute delegation was brought to Aleppo, Syria’s second biggest city and the theater of some of the war’s most violent battles. The incredible level of destruction tells a lot about the intensity of the fighting, and while one can assume many houses and buildings will be rebuilt, several of the most precious architectural treasures are now lost forever.

Aleppo is not only Syria’s economic capital, populated by three million people, it is also among the oldest cities in the history of human civilization, and has been inhabited without interruption for more than 6,000 years. Its importance is related to its geographical position, located on the trade route linking former Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean Sea. This historical dimension is reflected through the many beautiful monuments in the city, among them several which are on UNESCO’s World Heritage list, including the Great Mosque of Damascus, the Al-Madina Souk, and the Citadel.

As of today, the mosque is heavily damaged and its 8th century minaret destroyed. The Al-Madina souk, the world’s biggest covered market, dating from the 14th Century, was largely destroyed in September 2012, during the rebel offensive, plus later bombardments and battles. At least 700 shops were obliterated, leaving this beating heart of Aleppo’s life empty and deserted.

Aleppo’s Citadel, where the governmental forces

held their positions, also significantly suffered when— notwithstanding other destruction—a tunnel located under it was blown up. Although pro-rebel sources attribute this to the government forces themselves, it is well known that the terrorists’ strategy was to use tunnels and sewers as hiding places, from which they could pop out unexpectedly, in order to shoot randomly at passers-by, in a strategy of terror.

The Spiritual Warfare over Palmyra

The next day, our delegation took to the road again, this time in the direction of Palmyra, driving through small agricultural places mainly dedicated to olive groves, many of which now resemble desert landscapes as a result of the war.

After long hours, we finally arrived in the city of Palmyra, here again heavily destroyed. Our first stop was to the museum, a place of desolation, where almost nothing is left after the methodical destruction of the collections. Nonetheless, thanks to the dedication of the museum’s personnel, cultural authorities and soldiers, many pieces (although only those which could be transported) had been evacuated to Damascus in time.

It is difficult to add to what has been widely reported and commented on about fate of Palmyra’s archeologi-



Odile Mojon

The ancient Silk Road city of Palmyra was intentionally severely damaged by the terrorists. Here the delegation, accompanied by two soldiers, is inspecting the dynamited amphitheater before restoration, which still demonstrates the former splendor of Palmyra.

cal site. On the spot, we could attest to the absence of any strategic military need or gain to be expected from the staged barbarism which took place there, except for a desire to stir awe and terror. Today the most renowned and prominent parts of the site have either been reduced to dust or are in pieces lying scattered on the ground. Such is the case of the Temple of Bel, the Tetrastyle, the Arch of Triumph, and, to a lesser extent, the amphitheater, among others.

Nonetheless, that carefully targeted destruction provides clues as to what would otherwise appear as sheer arbitrariness. Indeed, they have to be understood not only as a will to erase Syria's memory and cultural heritage, but also as components of a message from the leaders of the Islamic state.

The message is as simple as it is monstrous: "Whoever and whatever does not share our barbaric 'thinking' is to be annihilated." Hence, a profound hatred of beauty and knowledge—which was tragically illustrated by the murder of archaeologist Khaled al-Asaad, the former head of Palmyra's antiquities. After being detained and interrogated for a month by ISIS about the location of treasures from Palmyra, he was executed because he refused to cooperate. The renowned and respected 83-year-old scholar was beheaded in front of dozens of people in a square outside the town's museum. It is said that his body was then taken to Palmyra's archaeological site and hung from one of the Roman columns.

The destruction of the Palmyra archaeological site made clear the purpose of the jihadists. The final objective could not, by any means, be reduced to the mere conquest of highly symbolic places or the elimination of enemies. It aimed at killing something more essential for any human being: knowledge, beauty, and everything relating to the spirit—to eliminate that which gives people a sense of purpose in life and identity, through their creative mind, as being part of the universal human family. This bestiality in Syria is even more compelling than similar destruction in other countries, such as what had already

happened in Baghdad and Mosul, Iraq.

Why so? Because Syria, being at the crossroads of both the ancient and coming new silk roads, being located at a place receiving the nurturing influence of multiple cultures, is by its very history a vivid example of what membership in the universal human family implies. In this context, one can assume that the rage of destroying memory, culture and faith in the human mind was considered by the terrorists as a crucial strategic aim.

Throughout all of our travels, the delegation guide displayed the strong spirit of the Syrian people to fully defeat the terrorists and put the war behind them. He was Professor Mahmoud Aboura, an archaeologist, one who knows every stone in ancient Palmyra and is experienced in restorations of historical monuments. Although deeply shocked by the devastation, which he himself saw for the first time, he pointed out the immediate steps which he would take to restore the dynamited amphitheater.

Back in Damascus, at a press conference, Minister of Tourism Eng. Beshr Yazji called for support from the international scientific community to restore Palmyra as far as possible. He said the severely damaged ancient columns and buildings of Palmyra will be restored, and next year the Silk Road Cultural Festivals in the ruins of Palmyra will be relaunched. Another big trade fair in Damascus for the reconstruction of Syria, called "Re-build Syria," is coming up, October 2-6.