

ONE WILPF All Member Call -- November 10th, 2016 4pm pacific/7pm eastern

36 WILPF Members from 22 branches, and 4 At- Large Members attended the 5th ONE WILPF Call on Thursday, Nov. 10th ([list appears at the end of these notes](#)).

The featured speaker, Phyllis Bennis, appeared at the invitation of the WILPF US MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE (thank you Odile Hugonot Haber of Ann Arbor MI and Barbara Taft of Greater Phoenix AZ). Phyllis addressed the situation in Syria, praised our WILPF US Syria statement (making the suggestion that we add Saudi Arabia to the list of countries mentioned) and suggested ways that WILPF US members could be involved in efforts to bring peace to the region. She was clear that the Peace Community in the US must UNITE in their efforts to bring the fighting to an end and not concentrate on selecting winners. There can be no winners in this series of proxy wars that punish most the Syrian people and offer them no way forward.

The two major sections of this call focused on

- Addressing the important issues around the Syrian War and how WILPF members can help bring about peace in the area, especially in the wake of the recent US Elections.
- Break Out Rooms addressed 3 subjects.
 - Continuing planning for the April 2017 SOLIDARITY EVENT
 - SHARING RESOURCES, Strategies and Materials between branches and members
 - Discussing how WILPF members can continue to work on peace in Syria

HERE IS THE AUDIO LINK if you want to listen to the call again, or if you didn't get to be on the call.
<http://mcrecordings.s3.amazonaws.com/URF4DF8865069NP74YY0C9D7FS7K114E.mp3>

CALL SUMMARY IN BRIEF: (full notes follow for those who wish more detail).

ONE WILPF Call participants enjoyed a gathering space before the call began, where the tragic outcome of our US Presidential Election was much discussed and comfort was sought and given.

1. **Our special featured guest PHYLLIS BENNIS**, a staff member at the Policy Institute in Washington DC, provided a historical and political context to the ongoing violence and series of proxy wars being conducted in Syria. She also advised about what WILPF members might be able to do to encourage peace in the region. Phyllis presented for about 15 minutes and there was a very rich Q&A session where members got to ask questions and Phyllis was very generous in her time, answering in depth. *The full interview appears below.*
2. **BREAK OUT ROOMS & REPORTS BACK**
 - **SOLIDARITY EVENT** - lots of ideas for add-on potential. Next steps a formal proposal to bring back to branches and Program Committee to gain feedback, input and buy-in. We will be sending a formal proposal to branches, program committee and the board to inform them of our plans, obtain feedback, brainstorming and buy-in. A January 15th deadline was set for members and branches to tell us what level of participation they will have in the April event. We are still working on nailing down a final date. April 22nd (Earth Day) and April 29th are serious contenders. Tax Day was discussed as being very close to Easter Sunday, and therefore not a great choice. Both the 22nd and the 29th dates would combine themes of environmental human services, education, security and infrastructure benefits to Moving The Money from a War Economy to a Peace Economy -
 - #MoveTheMoney, in keeping with the theme that International WILPF is also promoting.
 - **SHARING RESOURCES/MATERIALS/STRATEGIES** - More information about what would be possible in creating a website or blog using either Wordpress or Tightpad to share printed and other resources of branches... Ellen Schwartz volunteered to take on this

effort and pilot sharing a number of preliminary resources to try it out. Ellen will contact this working group before the Dec 8th ONE WILPF Call with updates.

- **MIDDLE EAST** - A lot of concern was expressed for the safety of Syrian and other refugees. A suggestion was made for WILPF to connect with Mayors for Peace in cities where we have members, and start a campaign to protect war refugees. Some suggested that we put signs with the colors of the Syrian Flag in our windows to show solidarity with refugees and to offer a safe sanctuary if they feel threatened. Much interest was in providing support for refugees in our communities with acknowledgement of how MUCH time, effort and expense it takes to 'adopt' a single family. It is challenging and complicated and preparation must be put in place.
3. Goodnight/**Adjournment**
 4. **Soapbox**

BOOKS DISCUSSED ON THIS CALL: Phyllis Bennis's **Understanding ISIS & The Global War On Terror**
Medea Benjamin's **Kingdom of the Unjust** (about Saudi Arabia)

NEXT CALL is Thursday, December 8th at 4pm pacific/7pm eastern.

CALL DETAILS:

(all the news that fits, and then some!)

ONE WILPF CALL Team Members were introduced: SANDY THACKER and ANNE HENNY (both of the East Bay CA Branch), InterOccupy's Michael Ippolito and his partner Julie Durgin continued as engineer and technical facilitator.

During the ONBOARDING process, call participants had the opportunity to network for 10-15 minutes, checking in and sharing their own perspectives on the recent election results and organizing going on in their communities. This is an important segment for members to feel connected to one another.

The AGENDA appeared on the TEXT PAD, along with CALL NORMS, which appear below.

- a. **Be prepared and come ready to engage.** Read the agenda and do any preparatory work ahead of time.
- b. **Balance your participation**—speak and listen—and make sure everyone's voice is heard.
- c. **Look ahead to positive action,** not back on shoulda, woulda, coulda.
- d. Everyone is responsible for helping to **stay on topic**—capture off topic items in a 'backburner' and agree to discuss them later at a more appropriate time.
- e. **Be concise** and to the point.
- f. **Be open to feedback.**
- g. **Be prepared and come ready to engage.** Read the agenda and do any preparatory work ahead of time.
- h. **Balance your participation**—speak and listen—and make sure everyone's voice is heard.
- i. **Look ahead to positive action,** not back on shoulda, woulda, coulda.
- j. Everyone is responsible for helping to **stay on topic**—capture off topic items in a 'backburner' and agree to discuss them later at a more appropriate time.
- k. **Be concise** and to the point.
- l. **Be open to feedback.**

1. **ODILE H HABER INTRODUCED PHYLLIS BENNIS** on behalf of WILPF US and the Middle East Issue Committee -

Bennis is a recognized Middle East expert and staff member analyst at the Policy Institute in Washington DC. She founded the US Campaign To End The Occupation in Palestine. A detailed transcription of Bennis's presentation is here. Transcription of a rich Q&A segment follows the notes.

2.A PHYLLIS BENNIS ON: WHAT'S HAPPENING IN SYRIA & HOW CAN WILPF

MEMBERS BE HELPFUL IN BRINGING PEACE - BENNIS's presentation was complex, detailed and put the current events into historic and political context.

Beginning with a nod to the election results and what this might mean to peace work going forward, Bennis noted that **the centrality of Trump's movement threatens just about all of our issues and the heart of our work for peace.** Organizations like WILPF, which offer grassroots opportunities for ordinary people to become involved and engaged will be more important during these turbulent times.

Whatever ELSE we work on, a central part of our work going forward MUST be a focus on PROTECTION to all the vulnerable communities being most threatened, especially Muslims and Refugees. We must be effective in linking ENDING WARS to the idea of defending the VICTIMS of war and refugees of war. We must remind the government and the public that there would be no refugee issue without these endless wars.

Bennis applauded our SYRIA STATEMENT and merely suggested we add Saudi Arabia to the list of nations we mention as players in the region. **Read it at:**
<http://wilpfus.org/news/updates/wilpf-us-statement-syria>

There are MANY wars in Syria, not just one, as we are being told. We are being told that there is ONE WAR between the Syrian Assad Regime and its own population. The civil war is being explained as having morphed out of the Arab Spring. It is exacting massive casualties on citizens because the Regime and its allies has access to planes, weapons and bombs.

In reality there are a SERIES of PROXY WARS being fought in Syria for regional and global purposes and they involve forces and players that are at once in opposition and in complex entangled alliances. Here are some of the wars Bennis described:

- 1 A war for Regional Hegemony between Saudi Arabia and Iran, for control of power in the region.
- 2 A Sectarian War between Suni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran over whose religion matters.
- 3 A US/Israel War against Iran and a war between the US and Russia, both over global trade routes, sea lanes pipeline routes, power and positioning. These are about power and money.
- 4 A war between Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar over who will lead the internal Suni monarchy.
- 5 A war between Secular and Fundamentalist Islam.
- 6 A war between Turkey and the Kurds.

These are outside wars being fought in Syria to the last Syrian, but which have NOTHING to do with the interests or welfare of the Syrian people.

There is an urgent need for a DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION which will be extremely difficult and dangerous to negotiate and difficult to enforce.

It is hard enough to bring all the Syrian-based opposition to the table...the Assad regime vs Syrians demanding the rights of citizenship.

No peace will be forged until ALL the stakeholders and combatants, including those pulling the strings from far away, are addressed and engaged in a peace effort across all lines.

Bennis was clear that there is a LOT of MYTHOLOGY about Syria.

MYTH 1: The problem is that the US has not been intervening enough. We have been weak and indecisive and our non-intervention has made matters worse.

THE TRUTH is that we have been intervening plenty, but in the wrong ways. We are intervening militarily too much and diplomatically too little. We need LESS military intervention and MORE real diplomacy intervention. The perceived lack of focus is because of deep divisions between those who wish to ESCALATE the military intervention and 'win' through force (led by the Hilary Clinton backers), and those who want to engage militarily but with a 'smaller footprint' (led by the Obama camp). There are lots of divisions at the State Department and Pentagon and more shuffling is sure to take place with a new Administration. This is a huge divide that will be ongoing among the US ruling class.

What we need to remember is that this conflict is the result of MANY military interventions in the region and they have all led to failure: Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemin, Syria, Libya and Somalia. This should prove to people that military intervention is the LEAST promising course of action to take (except that we have the collective memory of a gnat!- mb's comment). People need to be reminded of this complex and depressing but important history.

MYTH 2: The US ruling class and Israel are united and always wanted to overthrow the Assad Regime in the interest of the Syrian people, and they see Assad as part of the "Resistance Front" or the "Ark of Resistance" in the region.

THE TRUTH: The history just doesn't support this myth. Syria has NOT opposed Israel's imperialism during Israel's Occupation of the Golan Heights. **In the 70's** the elder Assad, and later **in the early 2000s** the younger Assad, both worked to keep a lid on opposition in Syria against the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights. They made sure there was no substantial Syrian resistance. They even carried out huge massacres of Palestinians at Tel A Zaatar/Telazatar in support of Israel, backing a Lebanese faction allied with Israel.

In 1990 Syria sent bombers to participate in coalition attacks in Desert Storm against Iraq. **In 2003** Syria agreed to accept US torture victims who were outsourced to avoid scrutiny or court cases.

Only recently has Syria tipped the balance of US and Israeli support by their new alliance with Iran. That made the US abandon the alliance with Syria that had been so useful, resulting in a punishing series of conflicts that are destroying Syria.

WHAT CAN WILPF DO?

Bennis was clear that there is a serious divide in the Peace Community that threatens peacebuilding. We have to heal that divide.

- Some peace groups favor a WIN for the Syrian Revolutionaries against the Assad government, based on the spirit of the Arab Spring liberation demands.
- Some peace groups favor a WIN to support Assad and Russia, because they see the advantage of continued stability in the region.

What we SHOULD be doing in UNITING as peace advocates to fight for an END to ALL the fighting, not for a WIN for either/any side. There will be no victors, but there can be PEACE if we accept that lose-lose scenario and end the military intervention asap. Just as all prior military interventions in the Middle East have led to failure, this one will too. It's PEACE that we should be demanding unconditionally.

Here are the 4 POINTS that Bennis advocates strongly:

- **STOP USING THE MILITARY TO DESTROY TERRORISM.** Acknowledge once and for all that you can't destroy terrorism through military interventions.

- Work towards a FULL ARMS EMBARGO ON ALL SIDES. This will be strongly opposed by the military and industrial complex, but there is no other way for the US to show credibility in negotiating peace. As long as we continue to arm the Saudis and the revolutionaries, Russia will continue to arm Assad.
- USE REAL DIPLOMACY NOW based on the goal of ENDING the wars, not winning the wars.
- SUPPORT THE UN's EFFORTS TO AID REFUGEES and campaign hard for the US to accept Syrian refugees and work to provide a safety net for them.

She said that the Policy Institute was poised to oppose CLINTON's dream of a NO FLY ZONE, because that would have inflamed the region further.

Now, in the wake of Trump's victory, they are shifting gears and looking at a CITIES CAMPAIGN that links anti-war efforts with programs that welcome refugees and create sister city links. *(ed note: This seems to makes sense based on Trump's initial clues that he will be turning much of the decisions for once Federal policies over to states. We need to be active on our state and local levels to advocate for peace and protections and support for refugees.)*

Many excellent questions for Bennis were raised.

The Q&A Transcription (Section 2B) follows these notes, after the attendance list.

2. BREAK OUT ROOMS WERE ORGANIZED AND PEOPLE CHOSE WHICH ONES THEY WISHED TO PARTICIPATE IN. The topics for break out rooms included:

- **Solidarity Event Planning** with Sandy Thacker as note taker and Anne Henny as Facilitator. (both East Bay CA branch)
- **Sharing Resources, Strategies and Materials across WILPF US**, with Betty Traynor (San Francisco CA) taking notes and Ellen Schwartz (Sacramento CA) facilitating.
- **Next Steps for planning a WILPF response on the Syrian Crisis**, with Marcia Heath (Santa Cruz CA) as note taker and Odile H Haber as Facilitator.

30 minutes were devoted to organizing in each of these Break Out Rooms, followed by reports back by the 'reporter/note taker' in each group. We had to shorten Break Out Rooms because of the length of the Bennis Presentation and the quality and number of Q&A segment voices.

REPORTS BACK:

Break Out Room 1 - SOLIDARITY EVENT PLANNING - IDEAS FOR ACTIONS BY WILPF BRANCHES DURING APRIL 2017

Focus was on **events that members and branches could do beyond the MINIMAL Participation level** of making and taking photos of the BANNER that says "City WILPF SAYS #MOVE THE MONEY – from war economy to peace economy" and sharing them widely on social media and WILPF US. Many ideas were added for add-on events.

We should have a **MAP where we can post of where all the events are** listed.

CHOOSING A DATE is still unsettled. The 2 that were suggested on this call were Sat. April 29th, though someone suggested doing BOTH Friday and Saturday events. **We have to decide this very soon!**

JANUARY 15th was chosen as the ‘deadline’ for branches and members to **COMMIT to what level of activity and participation they want to have in this event.** Low, Moderate or Full. We will be presenting a proposal that branches can talk about at their next meeting, brainstorm about what they can do/are willing to do, and report back to us before or at the December ONE WILPF CALL.

One suggestion was to show a visual example of MOVE THE MONEY, with a wagon full of money being pushed between a recruiting station and a school, for example.

There is no COMMON THEME yet, but **we must get branches and members to buy-in to a COMMON THEME that unites us in a SOLIDARITY event.** A SINGLE theme across all WILPF, on the same day. If we can find out by Jan. 15th which branches commit initially, we can always add more branches later, but **the goal is to have MOST members and branches commit by Jan. 15th.**

ALL PARTICIPANTS ON THE ONE WILPF CALL, and ALL WILPF MEMBERS, whether or not they were in the Solidarity Event Break Out Room, SHOULD SEND ANY AND ALL IDEAS FOR THE APRIL SOLIDARITY EVENT TO: 1WILPFcalls@gmail.com

BREAK OUT ROOM 1 Participants:

Sandy Thacker, Nancy Price, Marybeth Gardam, Robin Lloyd, Lorna Paisley, Eileen Kurkoski, Mary Sanderson, Anne Henny, Barbara Taft, Joan Goddard, Cherrill Spencer, Carol Urner, Blanca Gerard (Amy), Floris Freshman, Peggy Olson. *(see list at end for contact info)*

Break Out Room 2 – SHARING RESOURCES, Materials & Strategies between branches and members.

DISCUSSION ABOUT NEXT STEPS WE COULD TAKE:

Last call we focused on creating a website or blog that would link to the WILPF US website, and allow members and branches to post resources that could be shared between us, instead of constantly re-inventing the wheel. Program ideas, regional lists of speakers on various issues, printed materials, event promotion materials, even youtube videos, lists of films and books, etc. More discussion about this discussed Wordpress or Tighpad as the formats we could use to devise our own website of resources. Ellen Schwartz volunteered to make one of these work for us.

It was decided to begin as a pilot website, posting materials from San Francisco’s handouts and see how difficult it is, how much interest there is in using the website.

Ellen will send emails to gather folks for more work before the December 8th call. Folks were interested in meeting between the ONE WILPF CALLS to start planning.

BREAK OUT ROOM 2 Participants:

Ellen Schwartz, Laura Dewey, Edith Bell, Joan Ecklein, Pat Schroeder, Betty Traynor.
(see list at end for contact info)

Break Out Room 3 – WILPF’S ROLE IN WORKING TOWARDS PEACE IN SYRIA

DISCUSSION ABOUT NEXT STEPS WE COULD TAKE:

There was a suggestion for branches and members to read Medea Benjamin’s new book KINGDOM OF THE UNJUST. It looks at how we might advocate for a total ARMS EMBARGO on Saudi Arabia.

Some were concerned about how we could best protect refugees from Syria and other war-torn nations. One suggestion was to make a strategic effort to connect with Mayors for Peace, building on what Bennis described as a city-to-city approach. We could begin a campaign to urge mayors to create safe sanctuary cities for refugees, along with the programs to support them.

To offer emergency protection to refugees it was suggested we promote a program that posts signs in our home windows with the colors of the Syrian flag, to show this is a safe temporary refuge for refugees.

We need to develop a 'script' that connects for people the link between endless war and unending flight of refugees. A kind of elevator speech, maybe a meeting presentation? Nada said she is looking for resources for help organizing to take in refugees. She is from Lebanon WILPF where they have an active program for this. She said it is harder to find organizations or individuals in Connecticut or the US to connect with on this action.

Ruth from Triangle Branch said that her church has adopted a Syrian family and even with the whole church community working together, it is a complicated, challenging and expensive effort that people and organizations must be prepared for, going in. There is a LOT of support necessary for a transplanted family.

BREAK OUT ROOM 3 Participants:

Nada Farhat, Marcia Heath, Mary Hanson Harrison, Judy Karas, Odile H Haber, Ruth Zalph.
(See list at end for contact info)

5 POLL TO MEET AGAIN BETWEEN CALLS...

We took a short poll of people who wanted to meet again between calls to stay on point.

The results were:

BOR #1 on SOLIDARITY EVENT: Marybeth Gardam, Sandy Thacker, Cherrill Spencer

BOR #2 on SHARING RESOURCES: Betty Traynor, Mary Brauning (St. Louis), Ellen Schwartz

BOR #3 on MIDDLE EAST PLANNING: Mary Hanson Harrison

We will send out an email to all the BOR Room Participants and ask if they wish to gather again and when might be a good time.

NEXT ONE WILPF CALL: Thursday, DEC. 8th 4pm pacific, 7pm eastern.

6 ADJOURNED -- Goodnight All! Everyone said goodnight.

Phyllis Bennis Q&A Segment is below the attendance list.

7 SOAPBOX - It was such a full meeting that only a handful of members remained on for the Soapbox portion of the meeting: Mary H Harrison, Peggy Olsen, Lorna Paisley, Joan Ecklein, Elizabeth Gerlach, Cherrill Spencer, Anne Henny, Marybeth Gardam, Natasha Beck and Ellen Schwartz.

Peggy Olson of Monterey suggested that the theme of ENDING MILITARISM as an umbrella issue for the MOVE THE MONEY Solidarity Event would be good, since it also applies to ending militarism in our police departments. Marybeth wondered if this was a broad enough umbrella to attract new people who might not understand what we mean by "militarism". But she said she would include it in the notes for the solidarity event planners.

Unfortunately the SOAP BOX was not recorded. Marybeth thought it would be and failed to take good notes. This is the only detail that survived. There was a lot of talk about how disastrous a Trump Presidency could be. And a lot of statements about how important our work is going forward.

ATTENDEES OF NOV CALL:

EMAIL	NAME			BRANCH	LOCATION
wilpf@wilpfeastbay.org	Sandy Thacker			East Bay CA	
nancytprice39@gmail.com	Nancy Price			At-Large	Davis CA
Ellen@nicetechnology.com	Ellen Schwartz			Sacramento CA	Sacramento, CA
lpaisley@sbcglobal.net	Lorna Paisley			At-Large	Los Angeles CA
michael@teamgood.org	Michael			INTER OCCUPY	Boston MA
jharlanherb@gmail.com	Jack Herbert			Portland, OR	Portland area, OR
eileenfoto@verizon.net	Eileen Kurkoski			Boston MA	Newton, MA
Prochelle1@aol.com	Paula Rochelle			San Jose CA	Saratoga, CA
deweylaura@att.net	Laura Dewey			Detroit MI	
ragingrannieruth@gmail.com	Ruth Zalph			Triangle NC	
mhsanderson@hotmail.com	MARY SANDERSON			Madison WI	De Forest WI
edith.bell4@verizon.net	Edith Bell			Pittsburgh PA	
regbirchem@earthlink.net	Regina Birchem			Minnesota Metro	Minneapolis, MN
pbennis@ips-dc.org	Phyllis Bennis			GUEST -	Washington DC
anneth16@sbcglobal.net	Anne Henny			East Bay CA	
Cglaser1812@gmail.com	Christine Glaser			Bloomington, IN	Bloomington, IN
rsolick@gmail.com	Randa Solick			Santa Cruz CA	
mbgardam@gmail.com	Marybeth Gardam			At-Large	Winter Haven FL
odilehh@gmail.com	Odile Hugonot Haber			Ann Arbor MI	
beejayssite@yahoo.com	Barbara Taft			Greater Phoenix AZ	
joanecklein@comcast.net	joan ecklein			Boston MA	Newton, MA
joan@rujo.org	Joan Goddard			San Jose CA	
sandy@sandythacker.com	Sandy Thacker			East Bay CA	Oakland, CA
jkaras@sonic.net	Judy Karas			Monterey CA	Monterey CA
cherrill@slac.stanford.edu	Cherrill Spencer			Peninsula/Palo Alto	Palo Alto, CA
carol.disarm@gmail.com	Carol Urner			Portland OR	Portland Oregon
cnell@earthlink.net	Patricia Schroeder			Santa Cruz CA	
roselvaungar@yahoo.com	Roselva Ungar			Los Angeles CA	Santa Clarita CA
btraynor@att.net	Betty Traynor			San Francisco CA	San Francisco, CA
harrison0607@msn.com	Mary Hanson Harrison			Des Moines IA	
amygerard30@verizon.net	Blanca Gerard			Essex County, NJ	Bloomfield, NJ
nbeckpdx@yahoo.com	Natasha Beck			Portland OR	
anadawn@umich.edu	Dawn Nelson			Ann Arbor MI	Ann Arbor, MI
florisrena@gmail.com	Floris Freshman			Phoenix, AZ	Scottsdale, AZ
Rhsilver@comcast.net	Genie Silver			Philadelphia PA	Wynnewood, PA
Nadafarhat12@gmail.com	Nada Farhat			At-Large	Bethel, CT
pegoo@comcast.net	Peggy Olsen			Monterey CA	
mjbrauninger@gmail.com	Mary Brauninger			St. Louis Branch	Creve Coeur, MO

Continued from Section 2A.

2-B Q&A FROM PHYLLIS BENNIS SEGMENT OF THE CALL:

Q1 - **Marybeth Gardam**(At Large FL) **Asked:** How great a role do OIL and PIPELINES play in the causes of the Syrian wars?

A1 - **BENNIS:** It's not a war for oil. It IS to some extent a war for real estate, about where Pipelines will go. But the Pipelines are only 1 factor.

Q2 - **Edith Bell** (Pittsburgh PA) **Asked:** You did not mention ISIS. How does that fit into the larger picture?

A2 - **BENNIS:** Take a look at my book UNDERSTANDING ISIS & THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR. ISIS is not the reason for the war. But it is partly why the US is in Syria. The hard push on marketing the impact of ISIS, the fear-mongering and terror descriptions of ISIS in the region is what forced Obama's hand to use boots on the ground and drones in Syria. In 2014 CNN's coverage of ISIS made possible the pro-interventionist arguments and started to win support for US bombing in Syria. Of course ISIS is terrifying and a huge threat to the people forced to live under them. But let's be clear: The military is NOT destroying ISIS. The Military and the bombing is destroying the lands where ISIS is jockeying for position.... The Military can certainly destroy the "Caliphate", the lands where ISIS is garnering followers. But it can not destroy ISIS. We will just end up killing more innocent civilians. ISIS won't go away once the Caliphate collapses. Their military fight keeps causing casualties that fuel ISIS's recruitment. ISIS has support in Iraq and Syria.

Q3- **Odile H Haber** (Ann Arbor MI) **Asked:** Which corporations are selling the most weapons for the Syrian conflict and what is the Relationship between Syria and Israel?

A3 – **BENNIS:** The relationship with Israel is not clear... Israel's interest was in the regional stability that Assad provided. While they are anxious for any weakening of neighboring nations, they don't want the whole region to collapse. They are concerned about spreading instability that could spill over into their world. They are concerned about the number of weapons flooding into Syria from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, the UAE and Qatar. But there is no clear connection to Israel right now.

The weapons dealers to Syria and its suppliers are the same that sell weapons to Israel: General Dynamics, Boeing, McDonald Douglas. The F16 bombers, the Apache Helicopters... all the guns...

Q4- **Peggy Olson** (Monterey Co. CA) **Asked:** Is the plan behind US involvement in Syria to support Israel in breaking Syria into smaller factions, as in Iraq?

A4- **BENNIS:** Israel benefitted from a dictatorial Assad Regime in Syria until 2009-10, when Syria aligned with Iran, Israel's nemesis. The US does not agree with Israel on this because it is against our interest to have a strong Assad. There was not the same level of Sectarian divide in Syria until very recently.

The neo-cons' dreams of conquest and imperialism are real, but that doesn't mean they have the means to accomplish them. There has been a lot of effort to put the blame for the Syrian Arab Spring on the US, denying any agency to the people of Syria. But that is not the case. At the start there was an organic internal uprising of Syrian progressives demanding the full benefits of citizenship against a dictatorial regime. The US wanted to support it, as they supported other Arab Springs in the name of 'democracy'. And the protesters and progressive dissidents were quickly overtaken by military actors... soldiers who had defected from the Syrian military. Then insurgents flooding in with access to weapons. Turks were involved from the beginning. And the US moved to take advantage of the instability. But importantly, the US is also responsible for supporting the Humanitarian efforts in the region.... The White Helmets who are bravely digging to remove the dead and injured are funded by USAID. This is being done for propaganda, it's true, but also we have to acknowledge the value of that kind of humanitarian effort.

We have to recognize the contradictory interests and sets of facts and definitions, goals and activities of various forces at play in Syria. It's complex.

Q5- Mary Hanson Harrison (Des Moines IA) Asked: Responding to the internal divisions you mentioned in the US Peace Movement, how could we approach Solidarity?

A5- BENNIS: The entire Peace Movement must concentrate, in addition to its peace work, on protection for refugees and Muslims... particularly as related to our peace work. Thus the link between the wars that CAUSE the refugees, and the costs of war. We have to stand up especially to Immigration authorities, the KKK, the racists and the misogynists and the Islamaphobia.

This division I mentioned in the Peace Community is very profound. In the past, in Iraq, some of us felt Saddam was a bad guy but an anti-imperialist and opponent of US colonization. Others thought he was a temporary evil on the US's hit list. But BOTH sides wanted Saddam OUT. Today in Syria SOME peace groups want Assad's forces to win, to keep some stability in Syria. These are supported by Russia and Iran. Others want Assad out and want the opposition to win, because he was denying freedoms to his people. These are supported by the US, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

We need a Peace Movement that is about PEACE... that doesn't support ANY WIN, but advocates for diplomacy and an end to violence on ALL sides.

Q6- Eileen Kurkoski (Boston MA) Asked: How much of the Syrian refugee flight is caused by environmental degradation, drought and storms?

A6- BENNIS: A great question. It's not as direct as that... but the original uprising had everything to do with climate change. Starting in 2006 huge numbers of farmers were driven off their land because of climate change. Syria has always been known as the Bread Basket of the region. These were wheat farmers and they were pushed into cities. Syria had been a strong social safety net place but when the younger Assad took over he pursued a privatized agenda that benefitted the 1% at the cost of the rest of Syrians. The majority became very underserved and oppressed. But the elite caste, which maintained its powerful 'connections' were still able to get what they needed. This set up a Sectarianism that had never been a problem in Syria before and it added fuel to fire that sparked the original uprising. So an economic crisis, borne of the climate change and environmental degradation, gave rise to the uprising and the repressive response, the influx of military and insurgents, and the rest is history.

Editor Note: To be clear, this is a tragically familiar story... not much different from what we've seen in parts of Africa, Latin America, Bosnia, and other places where resource wars erupt into wider conflicts. Depending on how Trump plays his hand, and the speed of climate crisis, we must be watchful for this same kind of cycle in America.