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Defending Iran's right to self-determination

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SLL photo: Greg Butterfield

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I was part of a U.S. anti-war delegation that arrived in Tehran on Oct. 9, 2010, to increase solidarity with the people of Iran, defend Iran's sovereignty and stop the accelerated U.S. push for war against Iran.

An independent Iranian nongovernmental organization invited us. It is made up of the largest student organizations in Iran in order to build anti-imperialist solidarity with Latin American countries. It is aptly named House of Latin America or HOLA, which is Spanish for "hello."

Some of HOLA's activities have been to organize solidarity trips to Nicaragua and Venezuela and hosting a visit to Iran by the Young Communist League of Cuba.

HOLA coordinators Amir Tareshi and Hamid Shahrabi spoke about the challenges to building solidarity with the progressive movement in the U.S. By standing the truth on its head, they said, the U.S. has given the impression that the Iranian government is dedicated to terrorism and corruption. Doesn't that sound like what's going on today?

They continued by saying that the great desire of the government and every person in Iran is for peace.

After a powerful revolutionary upsurge led by Islamic forces overthrew the U.S.-installed shah in 1979, the new regime nationalized its oil. With the use of this revenue, they were able to counter the many years of corruption fed primarily by U.S. and British hegemony in Iran.

The imperialists stole Iran's wealth while the puppet shah and his hangers-on

siphoned off enough to allow for their luxurious lifestyle. Once freed of imperialist control, Iran was able to dramatically increase health and education nationally using this revenue.

Rather than pay reparations for the 26 years of damage done to Iran's development due to U.S. dictatorship over the people of Iran before 1979, the U.S. instead imposes sanctions against the Iranian economy to continue that devastation against its people.

We hear about the contradictions and backward ideologies emphasized in the corporate media about every other country except our own when they become targets of U.S. imperialism. But without other facts a false picture is drawn.

I'd like to introduce some other facts kept from our ears about Iran:

At the time of our trip, we discovered that more than 65 percent of Iran's university students are women, as are more than a third of the doctors. At the time of the 1979 Revolution, 90 percent of rural women were illiterate; even in towns the figure was 45 percent. So, in a little over 30 years tremendous strides were made in regards to educational opportunities for women. Now large numbers of increasingly well-educated women have been entering the workforce.

Iran's comprehensive social protection system is equally impressive. The resources allocated towards domestic necessities do not end at the Iranian border. More than \$8 billion went to aid Lebanon in rebuilding efforts following its defeat of an Israeli invasion.

Iran's international solidarity efforts

The funds went directly to grassroots organizations like Hezbollah that built homes and repaired infrastructure destroyed by U.S.-supplied bombs during Israeli bombing raids in the 2006 war against Lebanon.

With regard to the flooding in Pakistan, the Iranian news agency Fars reports that early in October 2010, \$100 million was allocated for the reconstruction of the flood-hit areas in Pakistan. Add to that the construction of medical centers by Iran's Red Crescent Society.

Iran was among the first three countries which rushed to Pakistan's aid after floods devastated large parts of the country, while at the same time the U.S. was busy spending taxpayer money to kill Pakistani soldiers and civilians from the air with expensive, high-tech drones and helicopters.

Because Iran combines this type of solidarity in the region with the increasingly mutually beneficial cooperation with the socialist government in Cuba and progressive governments like Venezuela, Bolivia and others, Washington sees Iran as a threat against the imperialist aims of U.S. banks, the military-industrial complex and Big Oil and calls it "terrorist."

In fact, the accusation of fomenting terrorism and terrorists is absurd when you consider the U.S. wars in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen have all been contingent on cooperation with ISIS and al-Qaida forces, first created as a result of U.S. war on Iraq, with its foundations coming from the U.S. war on Afghanistan in 1979, where the Mujahadeen were propped up with billions of U.S. dollars.

In fact, just a few weeks ago, top generals from Iraq announced the holding of joint military exercises with Iran due to its successful assistance in keeping al-Qaida, the Nusra Front and ISIS forces from taking over Iraq and Syria.

U.S. interference exacerbates contradictions

The central point driven home very effectively by HOLA members was that Iran has become Western imperialism's primary target. They stressed that the primary work of the anti-war movements, especially those in the U.S., should be to build solidarity

with the defense of Iran and its right to self-determination, defending Iran from a U.S. or U.S.-sponsored attack.

They acknowledged that there were, as in all countries, backward ideologies and the need for even more progressive economic and social policies.

But, U.S. interference, they insisted, would only exacerbate those contradictions and that the solidarity movement must allow the Iranian people to work out the internal contradictions within Iran themselves.

They pointed out how the program for using nuclear power for peaceful energy was started under the shah with U.S. support after reports that Iran's oil will be depleted in 10 years. But after the 1979 revolution, Washington began opposing everything Iran did.

Imperialism's attacks against Iran had already begun back in 2010. HOLA activist Shahrabi told the delegation that over the decades of prior hostility, the U.S. and Israel were responsible for the death of 16,300 Iranian civilians.

If we are truly in solidarity with the Iranian people we must:

- 1) Lift economic sanctions against Iran;
- 2) Recognize the right of Iran to develop and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and their right to defend themselves against U.S. imperialism by any means; and
- 3) Stop all military threats against Iran.

