

French petty-bourgeois “left” plots military intervention in Syria

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As the Western powers move to destabilize and foment armed rebellions against the Syrian regime of Bashir al-Assad, France’s New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) is supporting and helping to plan military action against Syria. This follows their backing for the NATO war against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, under the cynical guise of “protecting civilians.”

Gilbert Achcar, a member of the international Pabloite United Secretariat affiliated to the NPA and a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, published an article in *Al Akhbar* titled “Syria: Militarization, Military Intervention, and the Absence of Strategy.” It recounts his participation in a conference of the Syrian Coordination Committee and Syrian National Council (SNC), whose leader Burhan Ghalioun attended, on October 8-9 in Sweden. A French translation was published on the NPA web site.

According to Achcar, “the organizers of the conference had invited me to speak on the subject of foreign military intervention in the current situation in Syria.” He stressed that “the Syrian opposition must define a clear stance on the issue of foreign military intervention, since it is clear that its position has a major influence on whether or not intervention might take place.”

Achcar noted that the Western powers would not launch a military intervention in Syria unless the Syrian opposition called for it. He wrote, “The reluctance regarding direct intervention that we see today on the part of Western and regional states might change tomorrow if intervention requests made on behalf of the Syrian opposition were to increase.”

A conference with the SNC, which includes the US-backed Damascus Declaration and the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, backed by Turkey and Arab states, is a venue for plotting imperialist strategy. By attending, Achcar was functioning as an agent of the Western powers, signaling the

SNC that it should press for foreign intervention in Syria—as the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC) did to begin the Libyan war in early March.

The US, the European powers, and their regional allies such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia are supporting the Syrian opposition consisting of the SNC and its armed wing, the Turkish-backed Syrian Free Army (SFA). It is widely reported that Turkey and other regional powers are helping to infiltrate SFA forces into Syria. The Western powers are trying to use the SNC to seize upon popular opposition to Assad, inspired by working class struggles across the Middle East, to replace Assad with a right-wing stooge regime.

Last week, EU diplomats agreed to drastically ramp up sanctions against Syria, with bans on investment in Syrian sovereign bonds, on private-sector bank loans and on trading in Syrian gold.

It is increasingly evident that Turkey, which is home to the Syrian Free Army, is preparing a direct military intervention. According to *EU Observer*, “SNC member Muhammed Tayfur is already in talks with Turkey on a secure zone 8km inside Syrian territory which would effectively give the Free Syrian Army a safe base of operations.”

These moves against Damascus are part of Washington’s campaign against revolutionary struggles across the Middle East and its preparation for a wider conflict with Iran, a key backer of the Assad regime. By presenting the interventionist policy of the imperialist powers in a positive light, Achcar is working to give imperialist intervention a humanitarian face. In this, Achcar and the NPA are continuing to support Western imperialism, as they did during this year’s war in Libya.

Achcar and the NPA applauded the NATO-led war against the Gaddafi regime, fraudulently claiming that it aimed to protect civilians rather than promote imperialist interests in Libya. The NPA even demanded that the imperialist powers

arm NTC forces. For his part, Achcar wrote: “Here is a case where a population is truly in danger and where there is no plausible alternative that could protect it. ... You can’t in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians.”

In an article published by the NPA shortly before the fall of Tripoli, Achcar denounced NATO for not bombing Libya strongly enough. He approvingly cited ultra-right *Wall Street Journal* columnist Max Boot, who complained that NATO should have carried out more than the 11,107 sorties by NATO bombers over Libya, especially as they had carried out 38,004 sorties while bombing Kosovo in 1999.

In his Sweden speech, Achcar covered up imperialist atrocities against the Libyan population, saying, “Intervention enabled the Libyan rebels to liberate their country from the clutches of their brutal dictator...” He absurdly claimed that “foreign air support relatively limited cost to civilian life.”

In fact, NATO warplanes bombed numerous Libyan cities and indiscriminately killed thousands of civilians. According to estimates by NTC officials, at least 30,000 people were killed and 50,000 wounded during the war.

While the Syrian National Council is calling for a no-fly zone, Achcar now points out that such plans in “Syria will either have a very limited benefit if it is to remain a no-fly zone in the strictest sense, or it will have devastating consequences in killing and destruction if it is to take the form of an all-out air war against the regime.” He adds that “foreign military intervention in Syria would thereby ignite the entire region, which is but a set of powder kegs.”

However, before such an intervention takes place, Achcar advances the strategy of building the SNC, as well as winning the Syrian army’s ranks over to the opposition.

This is a cynical dodge, trying to hide Achcar’s support for armed action against Syria behind his advice against immediately starting a mass NATO bombing campaign. This does not reflect opposition to mass bombings on Achcar’s part, but rather the ongoing debate among strategists of French imperialism. They prefer to first obtain the support of right-wing proxy forces on the ground in Syria itself, as a prelude to possible NATO intervention.

Last Wednesday, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé met with SNC leader Burhan Ghalioun in Paris. He told the press, “The Syrian National Council is the legitimate interlocutor with which we will continue to work.” He proposed, “We will ask our European partners about the possibility of launching humanitarian operations to alleviate

the suffering of the population ... Should we create humanitarian corridors, or humanitarian zones?”

EU Observer writes: “In terms of tactics, the creation of a secure ‘humanitarian zone’ fits with French military thinking on how to bring down Syrian President Bashar Assad. ...”

The *EU Observer* cited a French military source: “There is no will to go for a no-fly zone or buffer zone. It’s impossible to reproduce Libya in Syria, because of terrain which would make an air operation very difficult. But, the exact words I heard [from colleagues] were: ‘If the Syrian rebels manage to hold a position (a bit like Benghazi in Libya), all cards are on the table.’”

It is precisely because French imperialism wants the SNC to function as a proxy on the ground in Syria that Achcar has traveled to meet them. Achcar even gives them advice: “Toppling a regime, no matter what the regime, is a strategic goal for which the means differ according to case and country. The strategy depends on the makeup of the regime that the revolutionaries are trying to bring down.”

This SNC is not revolutionary, however; nor does it represent the interests of the workers and oppressed masses in Syria. Achcar’s promotion of the SNC as revolutionary is entirely refuted by the latter’s close ties with the Western imperialist powers and the Islamist regimes in Ankara and Riyadh. It is Achcar himself who is functioning as a strategist and errand boy of imperialism.



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