

UN lines up behind Arab League-Turkey action against Syria

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The United Nations General Assembly's human rights committee voted on Tuesday to "strongly condemn" Syria's crackdown on opposition protests and to call on Damascus to implement an Arab League plan to end the violence.

The resolution has no legal force. But it provides a pretext for the major powers to justify action outside of the UN—supporting the isolation and destabilisation of Syria, with the ultimate aim of regime change.

The resolution was passed in the wake of the Arab League's decision to expel Damascus for failing to submit to a provocative and one-sided ultimatum. The Arab League demanded the Syrian regime of Bashir Assad halt its bloody attacks on protesters, withdraw tanks from restive cities, engage in a dialogue with the opposition and admit observers into the country. No corresponding demands were made on oppositionists, who are engaged in an armed struggle politically backed by imperialist powers and other regional governments.

The demand was made while the Arab League extended de-facto recognition to the opposition Syrian National Council, which rejects dialogue with Assad other than the terms of his departure, and with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Lebanon and others backing the insurgency with money and arms.

Most important of all was the presence of Turkey at the proceedings, which is home to the Syrian National Council and the Free Syria Army.

With both Turkey and Lebanon discussing the establishing of no-fly zones on Syrian soil, the basis for a military intervention has already been laid. The United States, Britain, France and Germany have all been involved in discussions with Ankara, Riyadh, the opposition and other concerned parties.

Having secured the desired refusal from Syria, the UN resolution was moved as a means of bypassing opposition to action against Syria on the Security Council. The

NATO powers intend to make an end run around Chinese and Russian vetoes of a similar Security Council resolution condemning Syria.

The resolution was sponsored by Britain, France and Germany. It won the support of 122 nations, with 13 voting against and Russia and China along with 39 others abstaining. It will now go forward to the UN General Assembly where it is assured a majority.

Bashar Ja'afari, Syria's UN ambassador, accused the three European powers of "waging a media, political and diplomatic war against Syria" and encouraging armed groups to engage in violence, rather than national dialogue with the government. He added, "It is not a secret that the United States of America is the mastermind and main instigator of the political campaign against my country."

Susan Rice, Washington's UN ambassador, issued a statement endorsing regime change, declaring that the committee's resolution "has sent a clear message that it does not accept abuse and death as a legitimate path to retaining power."

Washington has also said that Robert Ford, its ambassador, would not be returning to Syria as originally planned, following his recall after angry protesters attacked the US embassy in Damascus.

Military intervention against Syria, even if waged by a proxy force led by Turkey, would be aimed at installing a more pliant pro-Washington regime that is no longer aligned with Iran, but with the Sunni Gulf monarchies. Such an intervention threatens a far wider conflagration, destabilising the entire region.

As in the case of Libya, the imperialist powers are relying on the 22-member Arab League—made up of feudal despots and the military junta in Egypt who are all involved in their own lethal crackdown on protesters—to legitimise this criminal venture.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé said he hoped that

the Arab League “would go further” in its actions against the Assad regime, which he said “has lost its legitimacy.”

The Assad regime is the focus of justified hostility amongst the impoverished Syrian people, motivated by the same desire for change that is sweeping through the Middle East. But dissident former regime supporters and Islamists, with external backing, have sought to take advantage of the movement for their own ends.

Armed insurgents, led by Islamists and backed by the Gulf monarchies, and Saad Hariri’s pro-Washington faction in Lebanon, are playing a leading role in the protests. They have now been joined by army defectors, led by Colonel Riad Asaad in the self-styled Free Syria Army, who has called for international backing for a no-fly zone and two buffer areas inside Syria to support his attempts to unseat Assad.

Turkey, NATO’s sole member in the Middle East, is crucial to Washington and the European powers’ bid to unseat Assad. Last week there were newspaper reports that Ankara had plans to set up a no-fly and two buffer zones inside Syria. The no-fly zone would provide air cover for military attacks launched from the buffer areas against Syrian security forces.

Ankara, one of Syria’s major trading partners, is also to impose economic sanctions against Damascus. This will have a major impact on Syria’s economy, which is suffering from the loss of tourism, the withdrawal of investment from the Gulf States, and armed attacks on its energy pipelines.

The Syrian National Council is a fractious umbrella group of discredited former regime supporters, CIA assets, Islamists and Kurds, which has called for a no-fly zone and Turkish military intervention in the country to “resolve” the situation. Turkey’s Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has held discussions with leaders of the SNC, which is meeting in Cairo today under the auspices of the Arab League, whose foreign ministers are also there.

Last Saturday, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on Assad to step down—comparing him with various fascist leaders and threatening him with the brutal fate of Libya’s Muammar Ghaddafi. “If you want to see someone who has fought until death against his own people, just look at Nazi Germany, just look at Hitler, at Mussolini, at Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania,” he said. “If you cannot draw any lessons from these, then look at the Libyan leader who was killed just 32 days ago in a manner none of us wished...”

It was the first time the Turkish leader had directly called for Assad to go, and follows King Abdullah of

Jordan’s call for Assad to step down.

On Monday, Turkish President Abdullah Gul started a three day visit to London, where the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition has colluded with the Syrian opposition for months.

The same day, Foreign Secretary William Hague held talks with the SNC, the National Coordinating Committee for Democratic Change, another umbrella group of oppositionists, and other oppositionists. After the meeting, Hague said, “I think the Assad regime will find that more and more governments around the world are willing to work with the opposition.”

“We want to continue to step up the international pressure on the Assad regime, a regime that has long since lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the wider world.”

The meeting paves the way for the SNC’s formal recognition as the country’s representative in place of Assad, although officials denied this was imminent. Later, both groups met senior officials in Downing Street. Last week, Frances Guy, a former ambassador to Lebanon who has been involved in three months of secret discussions, was appointed to liaise with the SNC.

Canada has also announced that it will keep its navy in the Mediterranean for another year, despite the completion of its Libyan mission, indicating a possible NATO intervention against Syria. Defence Minister Peter MacKay announced the decision on Sunday, at the end of an international meeting of security and defence officials that discussed the situation.

Behind these criminal and reckless manoeuvres against Syria lies the concern of Washington and its regional allies over Iran’s rising influence in the region. The US’ withdrawal from Iraq and Tehran’s alliance with Damascus and Hezbollah, which last January brought down the pro-Washington Hariri government in Lebanon, gives Iran a sphere of influence from western Afghanistan to the Mediterranean. By neutering Iran’s key ally, Syria, and hence Hezbollah, Washington seeks to reverse the situation in its favour.



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