

Rising demands for military intervention in Syria

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The United States and France are intensifying their demands for action against the government of Bashar al-Assad through their proxies—the Syrian National Council, the Free Syria Army (FSA), the Arab League and the United Nations.

Navi Pillay, the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner said that 5,000 civilians had been killed since March, and called for the Assad regime to be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Opposition groups have said that since Monday about 250 people, mostly army defectors, have been killed, mainly in Idlib province bordering Turkey, as part of Assad's clampdown.

There were also reports of fighting by FSA forces in Douma, a large town in the suburbs of Damascus. FSA officials claim to have approximately 2,000 men running operations around Damascus, the Syrian capital, which previously was considered a stronghold of the Assad regime.

The Syrian government stated that about 2,000 security forces have been killed by “terrorist gangs”, armed and financed by foreign powers. Earlier this week, it announced that anyone caught smuggling arms into Syria or carrying arms for terrorist purposes will be sentenced to death.

As the civil war between Western-backed Sunni insurgents and Assad's Alawite regime escalates, various imperialist and regional powers are using the turmoil to justify military intervention against Syria, to install a more pliant and pro-US regime in Damascus. This is also part of a broader regional confrontation with Iran.

The Syrian National Council comprises Islamists, former regime officials and Syrian Kurds. It is offering its services to Washington through a closer alliance with the Gulf States and other Sunni Arab powers

including Turkey. It is promising that a SNC government would sever the ties with Iran, which is a Shia regime, end support for Hezbollah and Hamas, and negotiate with Israel for the return of the Golan Heights.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has held meetings with members of the SNC, which she described as the “leading and legitimate representative of Syrians seeking a peaceful, democratic transition.”

The SNC has called for the UN Security Council to declare a “protected zone” in the areas under attack from Syrian security forces. France has backed the call, with Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero urging that the UN Security Council “issues a firm resolution that calls for an end to the repression.”

The Free Syria Army (FSA), consisting of Sunni army defectors and some 600 Libyan mercenaries with arms from NATO and Qatar, has repeatedly called for a NATO no-fly zone and military intervention. Backed by Turkey, Lebanon, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, its forces operate from Tripoli in northern Lebanon and Turkey's Hatay province. This is close to Syria's Idlib province, where NATO and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have set up a training base in preparation for a “humanitarian corridor”.

According to the French weekly, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, and the Turkish daily *Milliyet*, the FSA is receiving training from British commanders and French intelligence. The FSA has boasted of attacks on Syria's security forces, ambushes, assassinations, blowing up oil pipelines, and other operations around Homs and Hama, in Idlib and near Syria's southern border with Jordan.

The demands of the SNC and FSA parrot the “humanitarian concerns” that led to the NATO “no fly” zones used as a cover for military support for the

Transitional National Council in Libya in order to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi.

Washington has so far officially ruled out a NATO-led Libya-style intervention against Syria, in part because it has doubts about the viability of the SNC. It appears to favour a Turkish and/or an Arab-led intervention. Ankara is widely believed to be preparing no-fly zones and humanitarian buffer zones in northern Syria.

However, according to Sibel Edmonds, a whistleblower who once worked as a translator for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, US troops just released from Iraq have deployed to King Hussein air base in al-Mafraq, near Jordan's northern border with Syria. Al-Mafraq is close to Dara'a, one of the epicentres of the opposition to the Assad regime.

This means that Syria is now surrounded on three of its borders—with US, Turkish, British and French forces in place, should Washington decide on military intervention either directly or through its regional proxies.

The SNC's demand for UN action follows its conference in Tunis last weekend. At the meeting, its chairperson, Burhan Ghalioun, called for an Arab military intervention. Ghalioun told reporters: "If the Syrian regime continues its violent repression, the SNC will resort to Arab dissuasion forces. We need to make use of force in a limited way and in specific areas."

"The Syrian revolution is like a pregnant woman, if cannot have a natural delivery, it will require a C-section to save the baby", he said.

Bassma Kodmani, another SNC spokesman, said, "We consider that the protection of civilians is something the Arab world, regional powers—Turkey in particular—and the international community should look at to see what measures should be deployed."

On Monday, following heavy pressure from Russia and the Arab League, the Assad regime agreed to accept an observer mission to monitor a deal to end the violence. The Arab League had threatened to go to the UN if Syria did not agree. An advance team of observers began arriving in Damascus on Thursday. The mission is to last a month, but could be renewed for a further period. It wants Damascus to withdraw all security forces from urban areas and release all detainees. In addition, the Arab League is to organise a meeting with all opposition groups in preparation for a

"national dialogue".

But Ghalioun dismissed Assad's acceptance of observers as a delaying tactic. "The Syrian regime is manoeuvring to try to prevent the Syrian file being submitted to the UN Security Council," he said.

Based upon the experience of Kosovo, Iraq and Libya, this is in any case a mission designed to fail and thereby sanction an international intervention to achieve regime change.

The aggressive stance of Arab politicians and the Western imperialist powers threaten to expand a rapidly-growing civil war in Syria into a regional war far bloodier and catastrophic even than those against Libya or Iraq.

Both Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon have said that they would respond if Syria is attacked, while Israel would be unlikely to sit on the sidelines. Lebanon, which is deeply polarised between the pro-Washington/Riyadh and Tehran factions, would likewise become embroiled. The increasing sectarian tensions in Iraq could reignite a war there, with reports that Sunni fighters are already aiding the Syrian opposition.

Both Russia and the US have sent warships to the eastern Mediterranean, setting the region and the world on a dangerous course towards war.



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