

Arab League mission to Syria becomes focus of demands for military intervention

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The visit by Arab League observers to Homs, Hama, Idlib, Deraa, the Damascus suburb of Douma and other conflict zones has become the focus of concerted demands for the Western powers to intervene militarily into the ongoing civil war in Syria.

The mission was endorsed by Syria, in line with an Arab League plan calling for the withdrawal of military forces, a halt to violence against civilians and the release of detainees.

The opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) initially responded with a media campaign designed to discredit the mission. Demonstrations were staged wherever the observers visited.

The Arab League monitors are clearly under orders from Washington to come up with a hostile report on the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. On Tuesday, the US State Department warned that “if the Syrian regime continues to resist and disregard Arab League efforts, the international community will consider other means to protect Syrian civilians.”

There is no reason to assume that the Arab League will disappoint the US. The head of the observers, Sudanese intelligence chief General Mustafa al-Dabi, has been denounced for his involvement in war crimes in Darfur, especially after he said the “situation seemed reassuring” on his initial visit to Homs. But Sudan’s Islamist government was given charge of the mission as reward for its support for the war to overthrow Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

By Friday, amid mass opposition rallies following prayers in several cities, there was a marked change in tone towards the mission. Washington urged critics to allow the monitors to finish their work and businessman Rami Abdul Rahman, head of the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, described the Arab League’s presence as “the only ray of light”

for Syrians.

Foreign Policy magazine this week wrote that “top officials in President Barack Obama’s administration are quietly preparing options for how to assist the Syrian opposition,” including the option of setting up a no-fly zone. The US National Security Council (NSC) “has begun an informal, quiet interagency process,” led by NSC Senior Director Steve Simon.

In mid-December, former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) whistle-blower Sibel Edmonds wrote that US troops have been stationed on the Jordanian and Syrian borders.

Foreign Policy cites a policy paper of the Syrian National Council, entitled “Safe Area for Syria,” which lays out the argument for armed intervention. The magazine fails to explain that the paper was produced by the Strategic Research and Communication Centre, whose head, Ausama Monajed, was previously in charge of Barada TV, a London-based US government-funded satellite network.

An Arab front for military operations with the aim of deposing Assad is considered politically expedient by Washington and other Western powers. This would deprive their ultimate target, Iran, of its main regional ally and help consolidate US hegemony of the entire Middle East, to the detriment of Russia and China.

SNC head Burhan Ghalioun has made clear that the SNC understands the Arab League plan to be a diversionary tactic behind which imperialist intervention is being prepared. He urged the Arab League and the United Nations “to defend Syrians by establishing isolated and secure areas inside Syria.”

The Arab League “plan to defuse the crisis” is a “good” plan,” he said, “but I do not believe the Arab League really has the means” to enforce it. “It is better if the UN Security Council takes this (Arab League)

plan, adopts it and provides the means for its application. That would give it more force.”

Events in Syria closely mirror the run-up to the military campaign to depose Gaddafi in Libya, with the SNC acting as a front for the operations of US, British and French forces and those of the Gulf regimes.

On December 27, the right-wing Israeli web site *DEBKAFfile* alleged that Qatar was building up a “Sunni intervention force of Libyan, Iraqi terrorists against Assad.”

It wrote, “The new highly mobile force boosts the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army, whose numbers have jumped to 20,000 fighters, armed and funded by Qatar and now forming into military battalions and brigades at their bases in Turkey... the Qatari and Saudi rulers approved a crash program for the Qatari chief of staff, Maj.-Gen Hamas Ali al-Attiya, to weld this mobile intervention Sunni Muslim force out of Al Qaeda-linked operatives for rapid deployment on the Turkish-Syrian border.”

DEBKAFfile reports that the force numbers 2,500, including 1,000 members of the Islamic Fighting Group in Libya (IFGL) and 1,000 operatives of the Iraqi Ansar al-Sunna.

The report cannot be verified, but it is in line with statements made by Britain’s Sir David Richards, chief of the defence staff, to the Royal United Service Institute in London this month. He insisted that the “key” to the success of the Libyan intervention, providing a model for future UK foreign policy, was “integrating the Qataris, Emiratis and Jordanians into the operation.”

These countries had made up the key land element of the war in Libya, Richards said. “Without them and their defence chiefs’ leadership,” he declared, “especially the huge understanding they brought to the campaign, it is unlikely that the NTC’s [*National Transitional Council*] militias could have successfully acted as the land element without which the right outcome would have been impossible.”

Qatar first admitted its role in providing ground troops to Libya in late October. Chief-of-Staff Major-General Hamad bin Ali al-Atiya, said, “We were among [the NTC] and the numbers of Qataris on the ground were hundreds in every region. Training and communications had been in Qatari hands... We acted as the link between the rebels and NATO forces.”

Wall Street Journal on October 17 reported “With the blessing of Western intelligence agencies, Qatar flew at least 18 weapons shipments in all to anti-Gaddafi rebel forces this spring and summer,” the majority directly to “militias run by Islamist leaders.”

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan were all also active in the Libyan intervention.

Back in November, Richards told *Sky News* that Britain had contingency plans should Iran’s nuclear program or a deteriorating situation in Syria necessitate action. “We’ve got a lot of plans in the locker, and we talk to other nations who would inevitably be involved in them so that if ever the situation deteriorated to the stage where armed force would have to be used, we could do it quickly and efficiently,” he said.

On December 29, Reuters issued an eyewitness account of the real situation on the ground in Homs. He describes a “vicious sectarian fight ... tearing Homs apart and overshadowing peaceful protest. Roads are blocked with checkpoints and some neighbourhoods are carved up by trenches. Kidnappings are an almost daily occurrence.”

The Free Syrian Army “launch attacks with increasing frequency,” Reuters wrote, while in Alawite neighbourhoods armed men and the security forces have formed their own squads.



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