

# “Friends of Syria” plan war, regime change at Washington’s behest

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The “Friends of Syria” are a gang of political criminals, gathered in Tunisia to plan the latest in a series of destabilization campaigns that have all ended in colonial wars of aggression.

Officials from 80 nations are traveling to Tunis, headed by the United States, which has waged half a dozen illegal wars in the past two decades at a cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. At its side stand France and Britain, former colonial powers that once carved up the Middle East between them and want to secure their share of the spoils of any re-division of the region’s oil riches. The imperialist powers are aligned with Turkey and the Gulf sheikhdoms—whose professions of concern for “democracy” are hardly less nauseating than those emanating from Washington, London and Paris.

The meeting at Tunis is premised on the claim that the Western powers are intent on protecting popular protests from the brutal regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The reality is that the imperialist powers’ intelligence agencies and special forces have been instrumental in stoking a sectarian-Sunni movement against Assad, plunging Syria into a bloody civil war.

Former US representative at the United Nations, Walid Maalouf, told Lebanon’s *Daily Star* that Washington is already “secretly providing aid to the opposition”. Some 50 Turkish officers have been arrested in Syria for helping organize the opposition, while Jordan-based *Al Bawaba* reported that over 10,000 Libyans are being trained in a closed-off zone before entering Syria to fight—paid for by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Russia’s Foreign Ministry has said that MI6 agents from Britain are already on the ground.

Syria is being targeted with the aim of setting up a new government that would break Syria’s alliance with Iran, consolidating US regional hegemony and

undercutting Russia and China.

The Friends of Syria is a new version of the Contact Group that led the assault on Libya and the “Coalition of the Willing” through which Washington invaded Iraq. The Syrian National Council (SNC) and Free Syrian Army (FSA) constitute the proxy force being groomed as a vehicle for imposing regime change, like the National Transitional Council (NTC) in Libya and the Kosovo Liberation Army in the former Yugoslavia before them.

The SNC and FSA do not fully control a Syrian opposition made up of disparate elements, including a significant presence on the ground of Al Qaeda-type forces. It is under orders to form a coherent and authoritative command structure with which the imperialists can deal. Once this has been accomplished, and they are declared the official representative of the Syrian people, it is a short step to declaring “humanitarian corridors” and mounting a NATO air campaign fronted by Turkey and the Arab League. On cue, SNC spokesperson Bassma Kodmani declared Wednesday, “We are really close to seeing this military intervention as the only solution.”

This well-rehearsed scenario threatens to end in a conflict far bloodier than Libya and trigger a wider regional or even global war. In the face of this threat, workers and young people must confront the abject failure of the official anti-war movement.

In 2003, millions worldwide opposed war against Iraq. But the forces that led this mass movement drove it into the ground. Petty-bourgeois ex-left and Stalinist groups internationally insisted that the United Nations, France and Germany could act as a counterweight to the US. A decade later, all three function as Washington’s partners in crime.

They have promoted organizations tied to the Muslim Brotherhood as representatives of the Middle Eastern masses. Today the Brotherhood forthrightly champions imperialist intervention and represses the struggles of the Egyptian working class on behalf of Washington. It was instrumental in setting up a US client regime in Libya and forms the backbone of the pro-imperialist Syrian opposition.

Above all, the collapse of the anti-war movement is a product of the rightward evolution of the ex-left tendencies at its head and their own embrace of imperialism.

The various ex-left groups, including the affiliates of the United Secretariat and the International Socialists, all championed the NTC in Libya. Prominent figures within these parties, such as Gilbert Achcar, openly supported the NATO bombardment.

The same picture is being repeated with Syria. The Socialist Workers Party in Britain, for example, has all but abandoned what remains of the Stop the War Coalition it helped establish, lining up behind the campaign for regime change in Syria. Shortly before the Tunis conference, the SWP solidarised itself with the Arab League, citing its “contradictory role.”

The League, it writes, “is currently considering arming the opposition and working within Friends of Syria. This would bounce the US into an awkward situation because many of Barack Obama’s advisers are calling for caution.”

With these words, the SWP lines up behind the efforts of the Arab powers and their agents in the SNC and FSA to create the best conditions for military action by the US.

The ex-left groups, despite their selective use of anti-imperialist and socialist phraseology, are parties of the bourgeoisie. They rest on aging, middle-class layers that long ago abandoned the radicalism of their youth and concluded that preserving the existing social order, both in the Middle East and at home, is vital to maintaining their privileged existence amid mounting economic crises and revolutionary struggles.

The only social force that can oppose the mounting war danger is the international working class, mobilized on a socialist programme to put an end to capitalism. The building of such a new anti-war movement by workers and youth in America and

Europe is the greatest service they can perform for their Arab brothers and sisters. It would provide a fresh impulse to the movement of the working class and oppressed masses of the Middle East, based on a struggle against imperialist intervention and to put an end to all of the region’s rotten and corrupt regimes.

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