

US, Russia clash over Washington's war drive against Syria

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The United States, France, Britain and the Arab League are pressing for the United Nations Security Council to adopt a resolution on Syria, while denying that it is intended to pave the way for Western military intervention.

This is a lie. While the imperialist powers and their proxies are helping arm "rebel" forces that are fighting a deepening civil war in Syria, they are simultaneously trying to intimidate Russia and China, who oppose intervention, by casting them as responsible for the deepening bloodshed in Syria.

The resolution explicitly demands regime change, urging President Bashir al-Assad to step down in favour of his deputy and prepare the way for multi-party elections.

Debate over the Arab League resolution has stalled, with Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, expected to veto it. Last night, diplomats at the UN leaving negotiations for the night said that "key differences" remained between the different countries.

In a propaganda offensive, one leading political figure after another has mixed demands for regime change with reassurances that no Libya-style operation to achieve this is under consideration.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that Assad's "reign of terror" would end, but claimed there was no intention "to pursue any kind of military intervention."

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé called foreign intervention "a myth".

UK Foreign Secretary William Hague, declared, "The resolution does not call for military action and could not be used to authorise it," but then warned that, "measures will be considered by this council if there is not an immediate end to the violence."

Moscow has rejected these assurances. Russian

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov pointedly refused to attend the meeting. Clinton's spokeswoman said he was unavailable when she called him to discuss the situation.

Lavrov warned that the resolution could lead to "another Libya". If the opposition "refuses to sit at a negotiation table with the regime," he asked, "what is the alternative? To bomb the regime? I've seen that before. I guarantee the Security Council will never approve this."

Russia's ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, declared, "The international community should not be meddling in economic sanctions or through the use of military force."

The Chinese Ambassador to the UN, Li Baodong, stated his opposition to "pushing for forced regime change in Syria, as it violates the United Nations Charter and the basic norms guiding the practice of international relations."

The draft is presented as a proposal for a peaceful transfer of power, stating that the security council is "reaffirming its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, emphasising the need to resolve the current crisis in Syria peacefully, and stressing that nothing in this resolution compels states to resort to the use of force or the threat of force."

But whereas it does not call for military intervention, neither is it excluded. Rather, it pledges "to review Syria's implementation of this resolution within 15 days and, in the event that Syria has not complied, to adopt *further measures*, in consultation with the League of Arab States" [emphasis added].

It was the Arab League which provided the US with a *casus belli* against Libya when it sanctioned the establishment of a no-fly zone, leading to NATO

bombings and military intervention.

That is why, yesterday, Vladimir Chizhov, Russia's European Union envoy, reiterated the demand for the resolution to include "the most important thing: a clear clause ruling out the possibility that the resolution could be used to justify military intervention in Syrian affairs from outside."

Behind the scenes, the US has made strenuous efforts to court Russia's support. The *Financial Times* reported that, "Syrian opposition leaders have joined western and Arab officials in New York in pressuring Moscow. Burhan Ghalioun, head of the Syrian National Council, the main opposition group, met Russia's UN ambassador on Monday, reassuring him that Russia's interests would be preserved in a post-Assad era."

The Russian government has until now refused US assurances on Syria.

Syria is Russia's main ally in the region. It has defence and oil contracts with Damascus worth billions and its only Mediterranean base at the port of Tartus. Moreover, both Russia and China understand that efforts to depose Assad are only a way of isolating Washington's main target, Iran, in an effort to secure undisputed hegemony over the oil riches of the Middle East and Caspian Basin.

This month, Moscow dispatched three warships to Tartus, including its only aircraft carrier. With the US, Britain and France having dispatched six warships to the Straits of Hormuz, led by the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, after an Iranian threat to close the channel, the danger of a regional war could not be clearer.

Plans for military intervention in Syria are already proceeding.

The US is working with the Gulf States, led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and Turkey to destabilize the Assad regime. The Free Syria Army (FSA) and its political backers in the Syrian National Council (SNC) are acting as a front for their military operations. In the run-up to the UN Security Council, the FSA escalated its offensive in neighborhoods of Damascus and the city of Hama.

The US media is openly debating whether the FSA should be armed by the Obama administration. CNN asked, "What kinds of assistance can and should the United States and its allies provide the FSA as part of an overall strategy of helping to achieve President

Obama's goal outlined last August to get Assad to 'step aside'? Or should Washington subcontract that such support to regional allies..."

Nicholas Blandford wrote an article for the *Christian Science Monitor*, "Free Syrian Army: Better tool for toppling Syria's Assad than UN?"

"Pushing for a UN resolution on Syria is one of the last steps the international community can take before mulling more seriously the military solution that some Syrian activists are openly advocating," he states.

He cites "US-based Syrian activist Ammar Abdulhamid"—a representative of the neo-conservative Foundation for the Defense of Democracy—who argues that, "a UN resolution is no longer necessary, and might even be counterproductive... What is needed at this stage is the ability and willingness to provide the necessary materiel and logistical support to the rebels and to provide protest leaders with the training and advice necessary to lead the transitional period themselves."

There is significant evidence of the US arming the FSA, with reports of unmarked NATO warplanes arriving at Iskenderun, near the Syrian border, delivering Libyan volunteers and weapons, and of US, French and British special-forces, providing training.

Turkey has made clear it backs a military solution. President Abdullah Gull told *Zaman* on January 31 that Syria was now on a "path of no return."

"The end is certain," he said. If "authoritarian rulers" did not reform, "foreign intervention will be inevitable."

Turkey is the base of operations for the SNC and the FSA. It is now offering itself as a home to Hamas, reportedly offering funding of up to \$300 million. The top leadership of Hamas, a Sunni group originating in the Muslim Brotherhood, has already left Damascus. It has close ties to the Syrian opposition, which is also dominated by the Brotherhood.



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