

Pentagon plans US-backed war against Syria

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The Pentagon has drawn up plans for military intervention in Syria.

A military strike would be coordinated with Turkey, the Gulf States and the NATO powers, according to reports that acknowledge such plans officially for the first time. The plan is described as an “internal review” by Pentagon Central Command, to allow President Barack Obama to maintain the pretense that the White House is still seeking a diplomatic solution.

This is considered vital, as military intervention would most likely be conducted through various Middle East proxies, which the US and NATO could then back with air power. Turkey and the Arab League states, led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, do not want to be seen for what they are: stooges of the US. Deniability for them therefore requires the US to conceal the full extent of its involvement.

In the February 6 *Financial Times*, Anne-Marie Slaughter, a former director of policy planning for the US State Department, argued for “A little time... for continued diplomatic efforts aimed at shifting the allegiances of the Sunni merchant class in Damascus and Aleppo.”

As with the war against Libya last year, military intervention would again be justified citing the “responsibility to protect” civilians. But its real aim is regime-change to install a Sunni government beholden to Washington, allied with the Gulf States, and hostile to Iran.

A State Department official told the UK’s *Daily Telegraph* that “the international community may be forced to ‘militarise’ the crisis in Syria” and that “the debate in Washington has shifted away from diplomacy.”

Jay Carney, the White House press secretary, said, “We are, of course, looking at humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people, and we have for some time.”

The Telegraph noted, “Any plan to supply aid or set

up a buffer zone would involve a military dimension to protect aid convoys or vulnerable civilians.”

Leading US political figures have also been calling publicly for the arming of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), an exclusively Sunni force stationed in Turkey and backed and funded by Ankara, Riyadh and Doha. They include Joe Lieberman, John McCain and Lindsey Graham.

The issue was discussed this week in Washington directly with the FSA, whose logistical coordinator, Sheikh Zuheir Abassi, took part in a video conference call Wednesday with a US national security think tank.

The US, France, Britain and Arab League are already operating outside the framework of the United Nations as a “Friends of Syria” coalition, in order to bypass the opposition of Russia and China to a Libya-style intervention.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia are known to be arming the FSA and to have their own brigades and advisers on the ground, as they did in Libya.

According to the Israeli intelligence website Debka-File, both British and Qatari special operations units are already “operating with rebel forces under cover in the Syrian city of Homs just 162 kilometers from Damascus... Our sources report the two foreign contingents have set up four centers of operation—in the northern Homs district of Khaldiya, Bab Amro in the east, and Bab Derib and Rastan in the north. Each district is home to about a quarter of a million people.”

But the Gulf States do not have the firepower required to overthrow the Assad regime. For that Turkey is the key player. Debka-File notes in the report that the presence of the British and Qatari troops “was seized on by Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan for the new plan he unveiled to parliament in Ankara Tuesday, Feb. 7. Treating the British-Qatari contingents as the first foreign foot wedged through the Syrian door, his plan hinges on consigning a new Turkish-

Arab force to Homs through that door and under the protection of those contingents. Later, they would go to additional flashpoint cities.”

Turkey is publicly debating military intervention based on establishing “safe havens” and “humanitarian aid corridors,” with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu visiting Washington this week after stating that Turkey's doors are open to Syrian refugees.

Writing in the February 9 *New Republic*, Soner Cagaptay argues, “Washington’s reluctance to lead an operation may prove a blessing, leaving space for Turkey to take the reins... Turkey would support an air-based intervention to protect UN designated safe havens—as long as the mission is led by a ‘regional force,’ composed of both Turkish and Arab militaries. Qatar and Saudi Arabia, who are funding the opposition, should be happy to work with their new ally in Ankara to protect the safe havens; Washington and European powers could then remotely back the operation, facilitating its success.”

The aim of isolating Iran has become the stated aim of US and Israeli officials, backed by a media campaign prominently involving the liberal press, mixing anti-Iranian sentiment with humanitarian hyperbole professing concern with the fate of Syria’s people.

Efraim Halevy, a former Israeli national security adviser and director of the security service Mossad from 1998 to 2002, wrote in the February 7 *New York Times* describing Syria as “Iran’s Achilles’ Heel.”

He writes, “Iran’s foothold in Syria enables the mullahs in Tehran to pursue their reckless and violent regional policies—and its presence there must be ended ... Once this is achieved, the entire balance of forces in the region would undergo a sea change.”

The *New York Times’* British counterpart, the *Guardian*, entrusts Simon Tisdall with the task of endorsing such anti-Iranian sentiment. He cites favourably Hillary Clinton’s ridiculing of Assad’s claims of foreign intervention in support of the opposition as being “Sadly... fully justified.” Rather, he insists, “The foreign power most actively involved inside Syria is not the US or Britain, France or Turkey. Neither is it Russia, Saudi Arabia nor its Gulf allies. It is Iran—and it is fighting fiercely to maintain the status quo.”

The appalling consequences of an American war against Syria would dwarf those of its Libyan

adventure. Syria is only the ante-chamber of a campaign for regime-change in Iran and its targeting poses ever more clearly conflict with Russia and possibly China.

Moscow last month sent three warships, including an aircraft carrier, to its only Mediterranean naval base, the Syrian port of Tartus. This followed its blocking of the US, France and UK-backed Arab League resolution in the UN Security Council, meant to pave the way for intervention, with the dispatch of Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to Damascus for talks with Assad, Tuesday, in a further show of solidarity. Lavrov was accompanied by Mikhail Fradkov, the head of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Office.

Of greater significance still were comments made the following day by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, linking efforts to overthrow Assad with a direct Western threat to the stability of Russia through its support for opposition protests there. “A cult of violence has been coming to the fore in international affairs in the past decade,” he said. “This cannot fail to cause concern... and we must not allow anything like this in our country.”



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