

New bid for UN resolution aimed at Syrian regime-change fails

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On Monday, Russia and China refused to sign a new draft resolution put before the United Nations Security Council condemning the regime of Bashir al-Assad, on the grounds that it could be used to justify military intervention in support of the Syrian opposition.

This was despite private talks between US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Clinton, Britain's William Hague and France's Alain Juppe all bitterly denounced Moscow and Beijing at a special session of the Security Council on the "Arab Spring."

Russia and China know very well that a UN imprimatur would immediately shift the balance of forces in favour of a plan for regime-change.

Lavrov denounced "risky recipes of geo-political engineering which can only result in a spread of the conflict." China's UN envoy, Li Baodong, said, "No external parties should engage in military intervention in Syria and push for regime-change."

Plans for military intervention have come up against the difficulties posed by any attempt at regime-change in Syria. But all of Washington's efforts are focused on overcoming the present stalemate, while continuing its campaign of political, military and economic destabilization of the Syrian regime. Behind the moral posturing and talk of diplomatic initiatives, the US and its European and regional allies are seeking to assemble the proxy forces necessary for intervention, while ruining Syria economically and breaking off a section of the Syrian bourgeoisie with whom they can work to oust Assad and install a client government.

For the US, the removal of Assad is seen as a major blow to his ally Iran, opening the way to military intervention and regime-change in Tehran.

An obstacle to implementing the schemes for military intervention against Assad is the weakness of the

opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) and Free Syrian Army (FSA). This is bound up with widespread hostility in Syria towards the sectarian Sunni insurgency.

In addition, there are rising concerns among the regional anti-Syrian forces, led by Turkey and the Gulf states, that they cannot count on the divided US political and military elite to provide the resources needed for an attack.

Last week Defence Secretary Leon Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey told Congress that plans had been drawn up for military intervention, but they cautioned against a unilateral US intervention and warned that any military effort would be more difficult than last year's US-NATO intervention to overthrow the Gaddafi regime in Libya.

The US has a range of possibilities—air strikes, arming the opposition, agreeing to guard a "humanitarian corridor" established under the auspices of Turkey and the Gulf states. But at last week's hearing, Panetta and Dempsey faced off demands led by Republican Senator John McCain for immediate air strikes.

Dempsey said that preliminary estimates of what would be required to mount a military intervention, beginning with establishing no-fly zones, had been made at President Barack Obama's request. But he described a well-armed Syria, with air defences five times more sophisticated than Libya's. An intervention would need "an extended period of time and a great number of aircraft," he said.

Democratic Senator Jack Reed warned that creating safe havens would "imply that someone would have to go in and organize training and organize, literally, an army."

A senior US Defence Department official over the

weekend added that creating safe havens would mean, “looking at a serious contingent of US ground troops.”

Michèle A. Flournoy, a former top Pentagon official, warned, “If we jump in with purely military instruments as the US, absent a broader strategy, we could very quickly hasten reactions from others, namely Iran and Russia, to bolster the regime and start us down a road towards greater confrontation.”

Three senior US intelligence officials spoke anonymously to the *Washington Post*, also describing Syria as a formidable military power, with 330,000 soldiers on active-duty, surveillance drones and sophisticated air defences. The army also has 4,500 tanks and 500 aircraft, including armed helicopters.

These analysts were forced to note that none of the defectors from Assad’s regime have been part of its inner circle. This is a reflection of a broader pattern of support for the current government, including not only the Alawite business elite, but also the Christian, Kurd and Druze minorities, all of which fear persecution by a Sunni regime.

These officials were scathing towards the Syrian opposition, which they described as being made up of over a hundred disparate and fractious groups.

Turkey is the key country slated to head any proxy intervention against Syria. It would rely on US backing behind the scenes, but fears that open association with Washington would be detrimental to its efforts to secure its own regional interests.

To offset this political danger, Turkish President Abdullah Gul and Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki issued a joint statement last week opposing intervention “from outside the region.” But Turkey has made clear that it could accept the endorsement of either the Arab League or the Friends of Syria group assembled by Washington as a cover for military action. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu declared, “Turkey is ready to discuss every option in order to protect its national security.”

Tunisian President Marzouki said Tunisia would be willing to send troops to Syria as part of an Arab peacekeeping force.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been unequivocal in their calls for intervention led by the Arab League. On Saturday, Qatari Prime Minister Hamad Bin Jasim al-Thani told a meeting of the League’s foreign ministers in Cairo, attended by Lavrov, “The time has come to

apply the proposal to send Arab and international troops to Syria.”

“When we went to the Security Council, we did not get a resolution because of the Russian-Chinese veto, which sent a wrong message to the Syrian regime,” he added. “Our patience and the patience of the world has run out.”

Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal denounced the prospect of more “hollow resolutions and... spineless positions.”

Lavrov rejected calls for Assad to step down and the League’s ministers were forced to agree in a joint statement that there should be no foreign intervention in Syria. The statement, which called for an end to the violence “whatever its source,” also demanded “unhindered humanitarian access,” which could yet be cited to justify Arab League intervention.

The Syrian National Council has issued a statement calling for immediate military intervention, including a no-fly zone, safe corridors, and a buffer zone policed by the imperialist powers, coupled with “an organized and speedy operation to arm the Free Syrian Army.” SNC foreign affairs spokesman Radwan Ziadeh, who enjoys intimate ties to Washington, stressed that the US need no longer be restrained by fears of a divided opposition. “I think the divisions are over,” he said.



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