

New York Times beats drum for war in Syria ... and beyond

Patrick Martin
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In a cynical and duplicitous editorial Saturday, the *New York Times* stepped up its campaign for US political subversion and military action against Syria, while demanding Washington adopt a more aggressive posture against Russia and China. The editorial, headlined “Assad’s Lies,” is itself a compendium of lies, as the newspaper reprises its role in the run-up to the US invasion of Iraq, when it peddled the Bush administration’s lies about supposed Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction” in order to neutralize the widespread popular opposition to the war.

The *Times* indicts Assad for “cruelty and blindness,” which would hardly make him unique in the region. Virtually all the US allies and client states in the Middle East—Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the military dictatorship in Egypt, the Netanyahu government in Israel—display those characteristics. This week, for example, has seen violent repression of anti-government protests in Bahrain and Tunisia, both right-wing regimes closely tied to the United States, along with saber-rattling threats by Israeli officials of a unilateral attack on Iran, an action that would represent a war crime of monstrous proportions.

The *Times* editorial is written in its typically hand-wringing tone, bemoaning the “bloodbath” in Syria and the danger of a “wider war,” although the policy advocated by the newspaper—and carried out by the Obama administration—leads inexorably to both outcomes. The *Times* would like its readers to forget the fact that the US government is directly or indirectly arming the opposition in Syria, using both American Special Forces and US proxies like Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, where does the danger of “wider war” come from—the beleaguered Assad is hardly likely to invade any of his neighbors—if not from the intervention of a US-led coalition along the lines of the

NATO operation against Libya last year.

Most sinister is the editorial’s indictment of Moscow and Beijing, as it presents US motives in the Syrian crisis as humanitarian, even altruistic, while vilifying Russia and China for “playing a pointless geopolitical game.”

While the *Times* suggests that the US itself is not pursuing definite interests, Washington’s “geopolitical game” has been prosecuted by means of aggressive war for over a decade. It has a definite point: the assertion of US hegemony over the rich energy reserves of the Middle East and Central Asia, at the expense of its geopolitical rivals. That Russia and China would oppose these aims is hardly “pointless”.

The current campaign for regime change in Syria represents another step in this eruption of military aggression. Spokesmen for US imperialism have admitted that the motive for attacking the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Damascus is not any concern over the plight of the Syrian people, but to further isolate Iran by toppling its sole ally in the Arab world.

The *Times* editorial argues: “Russia sells arms to Syria and uses its Mediterranean port of Tartus. And after the events in Libya, both Russia and China seem determined to deny the West another ‘win,’ so they keep hanging on to Mr. Assad.” After describing this attitude as “unfathomable,” it advises the Obama administration “to push Moscow and Beijing to cut their losses.”

The policy advocated by the *Times*—pressure on China and Russia to drop their opposition to intensified economic sanctions and other measures to undermine Assad—leads directly to military intervention, despite the editorial disclaimer of support for “another war” like that in Libya.

These dangers are underscored by an editorial

published in the other leading US daily newspaper, the *Washington Post*, on Sunday, which demands that the Obama administration abandon “feckless diplomacy” in favor of immediate military action. The *Post* brands all diplomacy a waste of time, pointing out that the US goal of overthrowing Assad is incompatible with a public posture of seeking a negotiated solution to the Syrian crisis—in effect, expecting the Syrian regime to commit suicide.

While the *Times* expresses skepticism—for now—about such military steps as the creation of “humanitarian corridors” to rebel-held areas inside Syria, or invoking the NATO alliance provisions for the defense of Turkey against alleged Syrian incursions across the Syrian-Turkish border, the *Post* expresses open enthusiasm for steps “that could be accomplished with a modest military force and could cause the regime to collapse.”

The two editorials demonstrate the lineup of forces within the American ruling elite: one faction openly baying for war, seeing it as the only way forward to assert US interests, while the superficially less bellicose wing takes one step after another in that direction, all the while proclaiming its “humanitarian” and “peaceful” intentions.

The Obama administration and its allies among the European imperialist powers are moving steadily towards military action against Syria. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, speaking at a press briefing Saturday, called for a UN Security Council resolution invoking Chapter 7 of the UN charter, the same section that was the basis of the UN resolution on Libya that provided the rubber stamp for the US-NATO assault on that country.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy went even further, openly comparing the Syrian military action in the city of Homs to Muammar Gaddafi’s threats against Benghazi, which provided the pretext for both the UN Security Council resolution and the initial US-NATO air strikes against Libya. Sarkozy called for “the creation of humanitarian corridors so an opposition can exist in Syria.” In other words, the US and European powers should intervene militarily to create a zone in which Assad’s armed opponents can be trained and armed to launch attacks, on the model of Libya’s National Transitional Council.

The working class in the United States and internationally must oppose every step taken to subvert

and attack Syria, an oppressed country long the victim of economic sanctions and military aggression by the imperialist powers and their proxies like the state of Israel. Syria is only the first step toward an even more devastating war against Iran, which US imperialism has now targeted as the main obstacle to its drive to control the oil-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

Even more ominously, the ratcheting up of tensions between a US-led bloc on the one side and the tacit alliance of Russia and China on the other raises the prospect of war between nuclear-armed powers, with incalculable consequences.

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