

UN agrees to deploy monitors to Syria as Washington ramps up military intervention

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16 April 2012

The United Nations Security Council agreed Saturday to deploy 30 international military observers to Syria. An advance team of six monitors met Saturday with former UN General Secretary Kofi Annan in the Syrian capital, Damascus.

Annan is in Syria as head of a mission sponsored by the UN and the Arab League to negotiate a six-point “peace plan” between the government of President Bashar al-Assad and armed opposition groups. A ceasefire was supposed to have come into effect on Thursday, but there are reports of ongoing fighting in several areas of the country.

A roadside explosion Thursday killed one Syrian army officer and wounded 24 soldiers and cadets near the northern city of Aleppo, close to the border with Turkey. Anti-Assad groups reported that security forces killed three people during a protest in the city on Saturday, though the Syrian state news agency SANA claimed the deaths were due to gunfire by opposition fighters.

Shelling and gunfire were reported in the central city of Homs Saturday. Reuters reported from sources in the city that the Syrian army began shelling the Jouret al-Shiyah and al-Qarabis neighborhoods of Homs after opposition fighters ambushed government troops on Friday night.

SANA reported that “armed terrorists” kidnapped an army colonel in the central city of Hama on Saturday. There were further reports from opposition personnel of fighting Sunday in Homs and in rural districts around Aleppo.

There is little independent media reporting from Syria due to severe government restrictions on the operations of foreign journalists, while almost all reports of fighting and casualties carried by the Western media come from opposition sources.

Despite the claims of the United States and its allies that they are seeking a peace deal and humanitarian relief in Syria, the Annan mission and the presence of foreign observers constitute a political fraud. They are a smokescreen behind which the imperialist powers and their regional proxies are advancing their agenda of regime-change in Damascus.

The US, the European powers, Turkey and the Persian Gulf monarchies have placed the entire onus of the so-called ceasefire on the Assad regime. While demanding that the Syrian army withdraw from centers of fighting, Washington has stepped up its support for the “rebels,” promising to deliver military communications equipment to opposition fighters. Meanwhile, the US-allied dictatorships of Saudi Arabia and Qatar are paying millions of dollars to “rebel” mercenaries who are carrying out attacks inside Syria.

These actions are intended to provoke a military response from the Assad regime, which the Western powers and the Arab League use to press their case for further military intervention. The US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, seized on ongoing fighting in Syria over the weekend to denounce the government in Damascus and cast “renewed doubts about the sincerity of the [Syrian] regime’s commitment to the ceasefire.”

That the “peace plan” is a thinly disguised maneuver to justify external intervention to overthrow Assad and install a more pro-Western regime in Syria was underscored by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s reiteration last week that at the end of the day, “Assad must go.” No prominent US media outlet or commentator has even raised the obvious contradiction between seeking peace with Assad and working for his destruction.

Backed by the Obama administration, the Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened last

week to take “certain steps,” including military intervention, if it deemed the Syrian regime to have breached the ceasefire. Turkey, which hosts the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) and its armed wing, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), has threatened to invade Syria to establish “buffer zones” near its borders.

The foreign-backed SNC and FSA, which have very little popular support inside Syria, are being groomed to overthrow Assad and establish a more pliant pro-Western regime in Damascus. Several factions within the “rebel” camp—a loose collection of Islamists, defectors from the Assad regime and Western intelligence assets—have rejected Annan’s diplomatic initiative.

Though the UN deployment of monitors to Syria was approved by all 15 members of the Security Council, Saturday’s vote was delayed 24 hours due to wrangling between the major powers. The Russian government refused to sign off on the original resolution, which solely condemned the Syrian government for the ongoing violence. Instead, the Russian delegation insisted on wording that condemned “any human rights violations by armed groups” and called on “all parties in Syria, including the opposition, immediately to cease all armed violence.”

Moscow and Beijing, which previously vetoed two Security Council resolutions condemning the Assad regime, have close economic and security ties to Syria. They fear that, as happened following the US-led war against Libya, Russian and Chinese business interests will be frozen out in the imperialist carve-up of the Middle East. In particular, they are concerned that regime-change in Damascus is only a precursor to a US-backed military campaign against Iran, Syria’s principal ally in the region.

Reflecting the issues at stake and the threat that the US-led war drive against Syria and Iran could spark a far wider and more deadly conflict, the Kremlin announced Friday that it would extend its naval presence off the Syrian coast. RIA Novosti reported that the Russian Ministry of Defense would send a replacement warship to the region next month after the destroyer currently on patrol ends its deployment. “A decision has been made to have Russian navy ships close to Syria’s shores on a permanent basis,” the Russian state news agency reported.

While an unnamed Russian official denied that the naval presence had anything to do with the conflict in Syria, claiming it was part of an “anti-piracy” effort, Moscow is clearly signaling its determination to maintain its position in the region, in particular the Syrian port of Tartus, home to Russia’s only naval base in the Mediterranean.



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