

Paris “Friends of Syria” meeting: Imperialist powers prepare for war against Syria

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The so-called “Friends of Syria,” consisting of the major imperialist powers, their NATO allies, and the Gulf monarchies, met Thursday evening in Paris to step up their war preparations against Syria.

At the meeting, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared, “I think we have to do more to take tougher actions against the Assad regime.” She called for a “Chapter 7 sanctions resolution” in the United Nations Security Council, referring to the charter provision that allows for military intervention against another country. She urged travel and financial sanctions as well as an arms embargo “and the pressure that will give us on the regime to push for compliance with Kofi Annan’s six-point plan.”

Clinton’s invocation of the Annan peace plan was utterly cynical. From day one, the US has used the ceasefire agreement brokered by Annan as a trap for the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. While feigning support for “peace,” Washington has continued to insist that the goal of the process is Assad’s removal from office and has tacitly supported ongoing bombings and other attacks by the Western-funded and armed Syrian opposition against Syrian government security forces. The idea from the beginning was to provoke the regime into retaliating against opposition forces and then use Assad’s violations of the ceasefire as the pretext for intensified military intervention.

Supposedly urging “peace” in one breath, Clinton in the next was announcing stepped-up US aid to the opposition forces. She announced that the US was “expanding our communications, logistics and other support for the Syrian opposition.” She also said the US was considering the coordination of assistance to opposition groups inside Syria in cooperation with

Turkey.

Media reports noted that Clinton was conferring closely at the Paris meeting with Prince Saud al-Faisal, the foreign minister of Saudi-Arabia. Qatar and Saudi-Arabia officially put the “rebels” on their payroll during the April 1 “Friends of Syria” meeting in Istanbul. According to reports, there are already special forces of the US, France, Britain and the Gulf states operating inside Syria.

Clinton also pointed to a possible NATO role in Syria. She referred to a border incident on April 9 in which Syrian forces allegedly fired over the Turkish border, wounding four Syrians and two Turkish staff working at a refugee camp. The Syrian regime claims that its forces had been attacked from Turkish territory previously. The region of Turkey bordering Syria is the opposition Free Syrian Army’s main base of operations.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan responded to the incident last week by referring to NATO’s responsibilities under Article 5. This article of the NATO treaty declares that an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all NATO members and can be met with joint retaliation. Invoking Article 5 would allow NATO to attack Syria without a Chapter 7 UN Security Council resolution, which has so far been blocked by Russia and China.

A Chapter 7 resolution allows the Security Council to take military action to “restore international peace and security.” Resolution 1973 adopted on March 17, 2011 under Chapter 7 provided the legal fig leaf for the US-NATO war for regime-change in Libya.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy set the tone for the Paris meeting. He called Assad a liar and compared him to Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi, who was murdered by Western-backed “rebels” at the end of the Libya war.

“Bashar al-Assad is lying in a shameful way. He wants to wipe Homs from the map like Gaddafi wanted to wipe Benghazi from the map,” Sarkozy declared on Europe 1 radio. He then called for “the creation of humanitarian corridors so an opposition can exist in Syria.”

All of this means that the imperialist powers have decided the Libyan scenario will be repeated in Syria. As in the case of Libya, the most cynical lies are being used to justify a bloodbath.

In fact, Gaddafi never tried to “wipe Benghazi from the map.” NATO, on the other hand, coordinated massive bombing attacks with its “rebel” proxies on the ground—aided by European and American special forces—ostensibly to “protect civilians.” In the process, the US, France, Britain and their NATO accomplices killed tens of thousands of Libyans and laid waste to entire cities, including Tripoli and Sirte.

On Thursday, the United Nations and Syria signed an agreement to send 300 monitors to Syria to observe the situation. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, meanwhile, demonstrated the role of the UN as an instrument of US imperialist policy by placing the entire blame for violations of the ceasefire on Assad. He denounced the Syrian government for failing to fully implement “its initial obligations regarding the actions and deployments of its troops, or to return them to barracks.”

Testifying before the US Congress the same day, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, gave clear signals that the US is ready for war. Dempsey declared that the US military would be ready to take action if called upon.

Panetta said: “I think it’s clear that the only way that the United States would get involved militarily is if there’s a consensus in the international community to try to do something along those lines.” He added that Assad “will be taken down.”

The strategically important country in the Levant has been gripped by armed conflict for 13 months. Soon after protests broke out against Assad in March of 2011, the Western powers seized on the situation to mount an intervention. Working with Turkey and the Gulf dictatorships, they armed the Free Syrian Army and other sectarian Sunni “rebel” groups to enable them to carry out terrorist attacks against government buildings and security forces.

The war preparations against Syria are part of a broader plan to bring the whole Middle East under direct imperialist control. In an interview with CNN on Thursday, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who met with Panetta in Washington, said that toppling Assad “will weaken dramatically Iran.” He continued: “It’s the only kind of outpost of the Iranians inside the Arab world. The Iranians are not Arabic, and it will weaken dramatically both Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, and it will be a very positive event.”

As in the case of Libya, France is playing a leading role in installing a pro-Western regime in Syria, one of its former colonies. On Friday, only two days before the first round of the presidential elections on April 22, François Hollande, the presidential candidate of the Socialist Party (PS), assured France’s allies that he supports war against Syria. “If it’s done in the framework of the United Nations, we will participate in this intervention,” he declared.



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