Washington’s proxy terrorist war in Syria

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The terrorist assassination in Damascus of three leading figures in the Syrian government took place in the government’s National Security building, targeting a meeting of the cabinet at which Syrian President Bashar Assad himself was supposed to be present. It killed Assef Shawkat, the deputy head of the armed forces and Assad’s brother-in-law, Defence Minister Dawoud Rahja and Chief of Crisis Operations Hassan Turkmani. Interior Minister Mohammad Shaar, head of intelligence Hisham Bekhtyar and other top officials were wounded.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Liwa al-Islam (Brigade of Islam) both claimed responsibility, with the FSA stating that powerful bombs had been planted utilizing drivers and bodyguards working for Assad’s inner circle.

The bombing of such a strategic centre of the Baathist regime could not have been carried out without high-level intelligence, contacts and trained operatives. It is hard to believe that it would have taken place without the knowledge and possibly the active connivance of the United States, Britain and other European imperialist powers that are directing the insurgency. Syria today is awash with advanced weaponry and military trainers and intelligence agents—funded to the tune of hundreds of millions by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

In any event, the innumerable statements of leading political and military figures—in the United States and Europe—make clear that the bombing is seen as a welcome blow against Assad’s regime.

Britain and France hypocritically condemned the bombing, but immediately urged support for sanctions against Syria based on Chapter Seven of the UN Charter. Chapter Seven provisions allow for military force and were last invoked as the basis for a UN resolution on Libya that paved the way for war.

The US administration did not even feign opposition. State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said, “The United States does not welcome further bloodshed in Syria. We note, however, that these men were key architects of the Assad regime’s assault on the Syrian people.”

President Barack Obama bluntly warned President Vladimir Putin that Russia would end up “on the wrong side of history... because Syria’s future will not include Assad.”

The US is in a de facto alliance with right-wing Islamists. Joseph Holliday, a former American Army intelligence officer now at the Institute of the Study of War, told the *New York Times* the Syrian opposition’s effective use of improvised explosive devices “comes in part from the expertise of Syrian insurgents who learned bomb-making while fighting US troops in eastern Iraq.”

Alongside numerous CIA assets and ex-regime figures, both the Syrian National Council (SNC) and the FSA are dominated by Islamist groups—the Muslim Brotherhood and yet more extreme Salafists. German news magazine *Der Spiegel* this week interviewed Randa Kassis, a member of the SNC, who admitted, “The reason the opposition has not been able to achieve a military breakthrough is also partially due to the insurmountable differences arising between the Islamist jihadi fighters and the majority of the population. The Islamist groups, which are superbly financed and equipped by the Gulf States, are ruthlessly seizing decision-making power for themselves.”

He continued, “In the countries affected by the Arab Spring, the Americans have put their money on the Muslim Brotherhood. They believe it will be the dominant power of tomorrow, and they are adjusting to that fact.”

Following the Afghan pattern, yesterday’s terrorists are recast as today’s “freedom fighters” by Washington and pitched against Assad’s Alawite

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regime in a sectarian conflict that can lead only to terrible bloodshed.

Such criminal means are inseparable from Washington's predatory aims in the Middle East. As with the war against Libya, democratic rhetoric and a pose of concern for the Syrian masses conceal the aim of securing US hegemony over the Middle East and its vast oil reserves.

The terror attack has been used to maximise pressure on Russia and China to support Chapter Seven enforcement. Moscow and Beijing oppose this because they understand that the downfall of Assad will see his replacement by a pro-US regime, depriving Russia of its sole military base in the region. It would isolate Shiite Iran and in all likelihood lead to some form of action by Israel against Hezbollah in Lebanon—leaving the US able to rely on various friendly Sunni regimes and its military strongman, Israel, to secure its commercial and military dominance.

However, the Obama administration will not be thwarted in its aims. Its officials have made clear they are at war with Syria and will seek to depose Assad by any means necessary. Yesterday the *New York Times* cited officials working on contingency plans "for a collapse of the Syrian government." Allegations of the possible use by Assad of chemical weapons against "opposition forces and civilians" were made to legitimise military action by the US or its regional allies, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The *Times* reported that "Pentagon officials were in talks with Israeli defence officials about whether Israel might move to destroy Syrian weapons facilities..."

As the US pursues its neo-colonialist ambitions, the peoples of the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia are being made to pay a blood price for the right of US corporations and banks to loot the world's resources so that the global super-rich can continue to live their lives in previously unimaginable luxury.

The undeclared US war against Syria can all too swiftly give way to direct military intervention, raising the spectre of a broader regional conflict ultimately targeting Iran and a whipping up of sectarian hostilities between Sunni and Shia throughout the Middle East with potentially devastating effects.

A vital political role is played in the scheming of the imperialist powers by the numerous fake-left tendencies that have lined up behind the Syrian opposition and portray its military campaign as a "revolution". It is nothing of the sort. The task of dealing with the Assad regime belongs to the Syrian working class, on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program. Support for the pro-imperialist opposition forestalls such a political reckoning. The intervention of Washington, London and Paris in Syria takes place most directly through the bourgeois leadership of the SNC and FSA.

The burning question posed before the working class internationally is to forge a new mass anti-war movement, animated by deeply-held anti-imperialist and socialist convictions. The cynical pose as "Friends of Syria" by Obama, Cameron, Merkel, Hollande and their ilk must be treated with contempt and met by a united stand by workers and young people against the common enemy. The immediate demand must be: Hands off Syria!

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