

# Bloody fighting in Syria as US pushes for intervention

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Heavy fighting and mass casualties were reported Sunday in the suburbs of Damascus, the Syrian capital, one day after a conference of major powers in Geneva discussed US demands for the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad.

The scale and intensity of the fighting were unprecedented for the capital city, one of the two main strongholds of the Assad government, along with Aleppo, Syria's largest city and financial and trading hub.

Unconfirmed reports suggested that the suburb of Douma, a focal point of attacks by US-supported "rebels," had been retaken by Syrian government troops amid large losses on both sides and the virtual exodus of the civilian population of the district, estimated at 500,000 people. Multiple press reports said that the Free Syrian Army, the main US-backed militia, had fled Douma.

Another district on the outskirts of Damascus, Zamalka, was the scene of a bloodbath on Saturday when an estimated 40 people were killed after a mortar bomb struck an anti-Assad funeral procession.

Heavy fighting was also reported around the central city of Homs and in Daraa in southern Syria, near the Israeli and Jordanian borders.

The conference on Syria held in Geneva Saturday ended without any resolution of the differences between the US and European powers, on the one side, and Russia, backed by China, on the other. The conference agreed to call for a transitional government in Syria, based on "mutual agreement" among the political forces in the country. Given the civil war raging, such a formulation is absurd.

The language was agreed upon under pressure from Russia and China, which blocked adoption of an explicit call for Assad to be removed from power. The

resolution specifically provides for the participation of members of the current regime in any transitional arrangement.

Nonetheless, US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius both declared that the "mutual agreement" language meant the elimination of Assad, since the opposition forces will never agree to the continuation of his regime.

Speaking of the final statement from the conference, Clinton told a press conference, "We agreed to some changes that we did not believe affected the substance, because frankly, we read the results to be the same. Assad will still have to go. He will never pass the mutual consent test, given the blood on his hands."

Fabius chimed in, telling television station TF1 Sunday, "The opposition will never agree to him, so it signals implicitly that Assad must go and that he is finished."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the language did not imply the removal of Assad, since under terms of the conference resolution Assad too would have to agree to his own departure. He insisted there was "no attempt in the document to impose on the Syrian people any type of transitional process."

The Geneva meeting was attended by the foreign ministers of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council as well as selected European and Mideast states and organizations, including the Arab League, but excluding Iran, Assad's main international ally, and Saudi Arabia, the principal financier of the anti-Assad "rebels."

Addressing the group, UN special envoy Kofi Annan, the former UN secretary-general, warned that the continuation and expansion of the civil war in Syria risked spilling over the country's boundaries and becoming a wider regional war of "grave severity."

Western press accounts admitted that the US and its European allies had failed in their aims at Geneva. The *Los Angeles Times* reported: “The Russians emerged victorious Saturday in a crucial battle of words. At Moscow’s insistence, Washington agreed to the removal of draft language barring anyone from the proposed transitional government ‘whose continued presence and participation would undermine the credibility of the transition and jeopardize stability and reconciliation’ in Syria. The text was clearly tailored to exclude Assad, though he wasn’t mentioned specifically. The Russians balked. The Americans blinked. The controversial wording was excised from the final communique.”

Tensions continue to rise along Syria’s northern border with Turkey, where most of the anti-Assad forces have supply and training bases. After last week’s incident in which a Turkish reconnaissance jet was shot down by Syrian air defenses while it was spying on Syrian positions around the port city of Latakia, the Turkish military said it scrambled fighter jets to its border Saturday in response Syrian helicopter movements.

The Turkish military has threatened that any Syrian movement towards the border, on the ground or in the air, will be treated as a potential attack on Turkish soil and dealt with accordingly, a formula for a direct military clash between the two countries, sooner rather than later.

According to press reports, US intelligence agencies have concluded that Turkey’s claim that its jet was shot down in international air space by missiles is false, and Syria’s assertion that the warplane was shot down in its air space by short-range anti-aircraft guns is true.

A report by the journalist Robert Fisk in the British newspaper *The Independent* suggested that the US-backed escalation of armed attacks on the Assad regime is being vastly under-reported by the media in the United States and Europe. Fisk cited estimates that 6,000 soldiers and police have been killed since the campaign against Assad began in March 2011, a figure that would place regime casualties nearly on a par with those reported (based mainly on information provided by anti-government groups) among Assad’s opponents, far different from the one-sided slaughter routinely reported as “fact” by the corporate-controlled Western press.

*The Independent* also reported that as 1,000 Syrians are being given military training each week by mercenaries at camps in Jordan, then returning to Syria to join the attacks on the Assad regime. Such training is no doubt being conducted by operatives from the US, Britain and other imperialist powers, and is reportedly paid for by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, two oil-rich monarchies closely aligned with US foreign policy.

Fisk also noted that the discussions behind the scenes between the US, Russia and the European powers were focused on access to the oil and gas supplies of the Persian Gulf, particularly under conditions of mounting conflict with Iran, which would make access to pipelines routes westward from the Gulf through Iraq and Syria particularly critical.

There has been almost no discussion in the American and European media about the actual imperialist interests that underlie the reckless and lawless policy of the Obama administration, not only in the eastern Mediterranean, but in North Africa, the Persian Gulf and throughout the world.

Washington has targeted the Assad regime in Syria for overthrow and it is moving towards some variation on the Libyan model, in which a combination of internal subversion and external imperialist military force is used to get rid of a regime now regarded as an obstacle to US foreign policy.

A successful outcome in Syria, as far as US imperialism is concerned, would create more favorable conditions for an aggressive confrontation with Iran, whose strategic position would be considerably weakened by the ouster of its sole Arab ally.



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