

Suicide bombing kills top Syrian officials

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A suicide bomber's attack on a meeting of cabinet ministers and senior security officials claimed the lives of at least three senior members of the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad on Wednesday.

Syrian state media confirmed Wednesday that Defense Minister Dawoud Rajha, his deputy, Assef Shawkat, the brother-in-law of the president, and Hasan Turkmani, Assad's security adviser, were killed in the morning blast, which occurred during a top-level meeting held in the tightly secured National Security Building in the Rawda district of central Damascus.

Syria's interior minister, Mohammad Ibrahim al-Shaar, initially reported as among those critically wounded in the suicide attack, was said to have also died, according to Hezbollah's television station and other sources.

An Islamist group, Liwa al-Islam, first claimed responsibility for the bombing, which Syrian officials said was carried out by a bodyguard. Later, the Free Syrian Army issued a statement claiming that the blast was part of its offensive in Damascus.

The use of suicide bombings, including previous attacks such as the May 10 twin suicide car bombings that killed 55 people outside a Damascus military intelligence building, point to the growing role of Al Qaeda-connected militants who have flocked to Syria from elsewhere in the Middle East.

The terrorist attack on the heart of the Assad regime occurred as fighting raged on for a fourth day in the Syrian capital. Since Sunday, Damascus, which had previously been spared the armed conflict engulfing other parts of the country, has seen sustained exchanges of gunfire involving the use of tanks, artillery and rocket-propelled grenades.

The International Committee of the Red Cross on Sunday declared the Syrian conflict a civil war. "We are talking about a non-international armed conflict in

the country," the ICRC office in Geneva declared.

The chief of the UN's humanitarian affairs office followed up the Red Cross declaration with a statement Monday warning both the government and the "rebels" that "directing attacks against civilians constitutes a war crime." Valerie Amo, the UN undersecretary for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief, stated: "The escalating conflict in Syria is having a devastating physical and psychological impact on hundreds of thousands of people. As the International Committee of the Red Cross has now described the situation as an armed conflict, international humanitarian law applies across Syria in areas where there is fighting."

The statements underscore the propaganda character of the reports in the mainstream media, echoed by pseudo-left elements internationally, portraying the Syrian conflict as a one-sided massacre perpetrated by the regime against its own people. In reality, a coordinated campaign by Washington, its European allies and the US-backed monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states has fueled a sharp rise in violence by sectarian-based militias, which have been armed, financed, trained and "advised" by these outside powers.

According to debka.com, a web site with close ties to Israeli intelligence, the widening scope of military operations by the so-called "rebels" has been possible because "Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have substantially stepped up the flow of munitions to the rebels." Debka.com added, "They are reaching combatants inside Syria as well as the trainees at Turkish military facilities."

Similar training is also taking place in Jordan.

The Free Syrian Army has been "equipped with hi-tech communications connecting the provinces and linked to the FSA's high command in Turkey," debka reported. It noted further: "A foreign 'military adviser' is posted at each provincial command center. They are

usually special forces experts mainly from the British, French, Turkish, Saudi and Qatari armies.”

In a display of brazenness and hypocrisy, the major imperialist powers have invoked the violence that they have promoted as a pretext for even more direct foreign intervention in Syria. British Foreign Secretary William Hague Wednesday issued a formal condemnation of the suicide bombing in Damascus, only to insist that the attack “confirms the urgent need for a Chapter Seven resolution of the UN Security Council on Syria.”

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told a Pentagon press conference that the bombing showed the situation was “spinning out of control” and underscored the need for the “international community” to “bring maximum pressure” to force Assad’s ouster.

In Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel chimed in, declaring that the bombing “shows us that it is high time to ratify the next UN resolution.”

Such a Western-backed resolution was to be brought before the Security Council Wednesday afternoon, before the UN’s special envoy and former secretary general Kofi Annan asked for a postponement of the vote until Thursday. The council has until Friday to authorize the extension of the UN observer mission in Syria put in place as part of Annan’s peace plan.

Annan is attempting to broker a compromise between the Western powers, on the one hand, and Russia and China, on the other.

Russia, which has been historically allied with Syria, has put forward its own proposal for a 90-day extension of the observer mission, but has vowed to veto the resolution sponsored by the US, Britain, France and Germany invoking Chapter Seven.

Chapter Seven of the UN Charter authorizes the 15-member Security Council to take actions ranging from economic sanctions to military intervention. The same section was invoked as the basis for a UN resolution on Libya that then was used as the justification for the US-NATO war to overthrow the Gaddafi regime. Russia and China allowed the passage of the Libyan resolution by failing to utilize their veto power, only to see their own interests in Libya sacrificed in the war that followed.

In Syria, the stakes are far larger, as US imperialism and its allies are fomenting a war for regime-change with the aim of shifting the geo-strategic balance throughout the Middle East in their favor and preparing

for an even bigger war against Iran, which is seen as Washington’s main rival for regional hegemony.

In an indication that more direct military intervention is being prepared, the British daily *Telegraph* cited Syrian “rebel” sources as saying they had been told by the Obama administration that Washington could not intervene militarily in Syria until after the presidential election in November.

“Basically, the message is very clear, nothing is going to happen until after the election,” a Washington lobbyist for the Syrian Support Group (SSG), the political front for the Free Syrian Army militias, told the newspaper.

Another “war of choice” is being prepared behind the backs of the American people, with the Democratic administration in power deliberately acting to preclude any expression of hostility to war at the ballot box.

The *Telegraph* reported that the SSG had recently submitted a request to Washington for military aid, including “1,000 RPG-29 anti-tank missiles, 500 SAM-7 rockets, 750 23mm machine guns as well as body armor and secure satellite phones.” A request was also made for \$6 million in US cash to pay the salaries of “rebel” fighters.



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