

Stepped-up calls for military intervention in wake of terrorist bombing in Damascus

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In the wake of the July 18 terrorist bombing that killed several leading figures in the Syrian government, there have been increasing calls for direct Western intervention.

Seizing on the spiraling violence that they themselves have promoted, and invoking the veto by Russia and China of a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing sanctions and the use of military force in Syria—the third such vote since the conflict began—the US and its allies are increasingly preparing for overt military action.

Fighting in the capital of Damascus raged on for a seventh consecutive day Friday, with government troops reportedly driving US-backed “rebels” from the Midan district in the southern part of the capital, where some of the heaviest fighting has taken place. Clashes continued, however, in other parts of the city as the anti-regime militias staged hit-and-run attacks.

The fighting has paralyzed much of the life of Damascus, which until last week had been spared much of the violence seen elsewhere in the country, outside of a series of suicide bombings. Public transpiration was reported largely shut down and garbage was piling up in the streets.

The armed clashes have also triggered an exodus of Damascenes, who are seeking refuge across the border in Lebanon. A spokesperson for the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, reported Friday that as many as 30,000 people had fled into Lebanon over the previous 48 hours.

UNHCR said that the total number fleeing the fighting and applying for refugee status in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan had risen to 120,000. Many more are believed to have left Syria without seeking such status.

Buses and planes have also brought thousands of the

1.4 million Iraqis who had sought refuge in Syria from the bloodbath unleashed on their country by the US war and occupation, back to Iraq.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent estimates that one million Syrians have been internally displaced by the violence as of last week.

Meanwhile, elements of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) seized control of border crossings into both Iraq and Turkey. The Iraqi government reported the seizure of four border crossings into Anbar and Nineveh Provinces. Iraqi Deputy Interior Minister Adnan al-Assadi told the AFP news agency that at one border crossing, FSA gunmen seized a Syrian lieutenant colonel, cutting off his arms and legs, and then “executed 22 Syrian soldiers in front of the eyes of Iraqi soldiers.”

Iraqi forces re-erected a blast wall and barbed wire barriers that had previously been put in place by US occupation forces at the border crossings, while both Iraq and Syria rushed troops to the area.

The Shiite-dominated government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has refused to join those seeking the overthrow of the Assad government in Syria, and some 70 percent of Syria’s imported goods come across the Iraqi border. Both because of its ties to Iran, which is Syria’s main regional ally, and its fear that a victory of the “rebels,” dominated by Sunni Islamist elements, would strengthen similar forces that have waged terror attacks inside Iraq, the Baghdad government has opposed the campaign for regime-change.

These developments underscore the fact that the Syrian conflict, stoked by the US, NATO and the monarchical Gulf states and their security agencies, has the deadly potential of spilling across national borders, igniting an even more deadly regional conflagration.

Friday saw the United Nations Security Council approve a resolution that limited the UN observer mission in Syria to a “final” 30-day extension, with the withdrawal of the 300 observers and 100-member civilian staff thereafter unless the UN “reports and the Security Council confirms the cessation of the use of heavy weapons and a reduction in the level of violence sufficient to allow UNSMIS to implement its mandate.”

The vote came after Thursday’s veto by Russia and China of a resolution sponsored by the US, Britain, France and Germany invoking Chapter Seven of the United Nations Charter, which clears the way for both sanctions and the use of military force. The last such resolution by the council was utilized by the US and NATO to justify their war for regime-change in Libya.

The veto was met with vitriolic denunciations from the Western powers. “The Security Council has failed utterly in its most important task on its agenda this year,” declared Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the UN. “This is the third time in 10 months that two members have prevented the Security Council from responding with credibility to the Syrian conflict. The first two vetoes were very destructive. This veto is even more dangerous and deplorable.”

This third veto has been cited by elements of the US political establishment as a justification for launching a unilateral intervention in the Arab country. “The United States and other like-minded governments should not equate the United Nations with multilateralism, nor should they see the UN as having a monopoly on legitimacy,” wrote Richard Haass, a former director of policy planning in the US State Department and president of the Council on Foreign Relations.

“To the contrary,” he continued, “they should form ‘a coalition of the willing and able,’ composed of NATO countries, selected Arab governments, and others that are committed to increasing sanctions against not just Syria, but those countries supporting it, building up the strength and political appeal of the Syrian opposition, pressing for war crimes indictments against Bashar al-Assad and his inner circle, planning for strikes against Syrian chemical munitions, and preparing for a post-Assad Syria.”

Syria’s chemical weapons are increasingly being cited as a *casus belli* for Western intervention. According to a Fox News report aired Thursday night,

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak have held “talks about destroying Syria’s chemical stockpiles.”

Warnings that these chemical weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists—Islamist elements of the Syrian “rebels” backed by Washington—echo the “weapons of mass destruction” pretext utilized to justify the US war in Iraq.

In an editorial Wednesday, the *Washington Post* advanced this pretext for military intervention. Citing “the nightmare scenario, when an artillery shell filled with sarin goes missing in the middle of a civil war,” the editorial stated that “an armed force may also be required to secure the weapons.”

David Ignatius, a *Post* correspondent with close ties to the US intelligence apparatus, cited chemical weapons in Syria as a reason the Obama administration was seeking a “managed transition” that would essentially involve the decapitation of the Assad regime—through such methods as Wednesday’s assassination bombing—while leaving the power of the army and the state intact.

Ignatius reported that the “CIA has been working with the Syrian opposition for several weeks” and that “scores of Israeli intelligence officers are also operating along Syria’s border.” Nothing could more clearly define the character of the Syrian “revolution.”

The columnist continued: “The Syrian denouement promises to be much bloodier and more destabilizing than what happened in Libya. It’s a measure of US caution that officials speak not of preventing sectarian violence after Assad is toppled, but of keeping it from spinning out of control.”

In point of fact, this is a measure of the ruthlessness of the US-led intervention in Syria, which has been mounted under the pretexts of “human rights” and concern for civilian deaths, but is fully prepared to unleash a bloodbath in order to install a regime more amenable to US strategic interests in the region.



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