

US uses WMD pretext to push for war against Syria

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26 July 2012

A military intervention against Syria is being prepared, utilising the “weapons of mass destruction” pretext that was used to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Pledging a future for Syria “free of the Assad regime” to a gathering of veterans in Reno, Nevada, President Barack Obama threatened Monday that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would be held accountable if he made the “tragic mistake” of using chemical weapons.

Earlier that day, the Assad regime issued a statement meant to call the bluff of the US and Israel and their allies, who have repeatedly raised the spectre of Syrian chemical weapons. Jihad Makdissi, the Syrian foreign ministry spokesman, declared, “No chemical or biological weapons will ever be used, and I repeat, will never be used... no matter what the developments inside Syria... All of these types of weapons are in storage and under security and the direct supervision of the Syrian armed forces and will never be used unless Syria is exposed to external aggression.”

Makdissi explicitly made the comparison to Iraq, stating that the issue of chemical weapons was being raised to “justify and prepare the international community’s military intervention in Syria under the false pretext of WMD.”

Obama was joined in his bellicose response by Britain and Germany, both of which denounced Syria for making such a threat, even as the West’s stoking of civil war and preparations for direct military intervention have become increasingly open.

The British *Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express* reported that more than 300 opposition fighters have completed a commando training program run by “former SAS soldiers” and other British private security contractors, while a “second ‘higher tier’ command course not involving weapons is being held in Saudi Arabia.”

Britain has placed more than 600 troops on standby as part of contingency plans to evacuate UK nationals from

Lebanon.

On Wednesday, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) issued a report stating that Western military intervention against Syria is “looking increasingly likely.” The RUSI depicted an imminent proxy war in Syria engulfing the entire Middle East, with Iranian-backed Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon and a Sunni insurgency supported by Saudi Arabia.

The UK institute studiously avoided the obvious point that the Saudi side of this “arc of proxy confrontation” is already heavily backed by the US, Britain and France, professing instead, “We are not moving towards intervention, but intervention is moving towards us.”

This is merely propaganda to portray plans already formulated as being forced upon a reluctant political and military elite. One contributor, former Afghanistan commander Colonel Richard Kemp, wrote, “It is highly likely that some Western special forces and intelligence resources have been in Syria for a considerable time.”

He added that such operations could include sabotage, encouraging a coup d’état and providing air support. “Preparation will be proceeding today in several Western capitals and on the ground in Syria and in Turkey,” he stated.

Michael Codner, RUSI’s director of the military sciences, wrote that a full-scale intervention would require at least 300,000 troops and a force of 75,000 troops would continue to be needed to safeguard Syria’s chemical weapons.

The US is working most closely with Israel in stepping up war rhetoric against Syria. National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton have visited Israel, and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta is expected next week. State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland said the issue of Syria’s chemical weapons was among topics discussed by Clinton. “Like all countries in the neighborhood, it makes

sense for there to be prudent planning for self-defense,” she said.

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Fox News that preventing Syria’s weapons from reaching Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon was “something we’ll have to act to stop if the need arises.”

Defense Minister Ehud Barak told Israel’s Channel 2 TV that he had ordered the military “to prepare for a situation where we would have to weigh the possibility of carrying out an attack.”

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said that if Israel learned of Lebanese Hezbollah militants raiding Syria’s chemical or biological weapons stocks, “For us, that’s a casus belli, a red line.”

It is clear that Israel is not merely contemplating action if Islamists seize chemical weapons. A military strike is under active consideration.

On Tuesday, Israel’s chief of general staff, Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, was moved to warn that in the event of an attack on Syria’s chemical weapon stocks, “The army may find it difficult to launch a pinpoint attack and we may be dragged into a broader [regional] conflict.”

The same day, once again on cue, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) claimed in a statement that the Syrian government had moved chemical weapons “to airports on the border.”

Turkey, the main base for the FSA, sent batteries of ground-to-air missiles to the Syrian border Sunday, while Syrian oppositionists seized control of three border crossings—Jarabulus, Bab al-Hawa and Al-Salama along the frontier with Turkey. The air defense missiles were sent by a five-vehicle train convoy to Mardin in south-eastern Turkey, to be transferred to several army units deployed on the border.

An FSA commander told the AFP news agency: “This border post has a strategic importance for the regime because this area is the most suitable one to set up a buffer zone.”

Establishing such zones on Syrian territory and issuing a no-fly edict would follow the pattern leading up to NATO’s war against Libya. In line with this goal, FSA insurgents in Aleppo claim to have come under attack from two Russian-made MiGs.

The oppositionists who seized the border crossings identified themselves as belonging to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and another Islamist group called Shura Taliban. This latest proof of heavy and growing Islamist involvement in the opposition came as their sponsors, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar and the

rest of the Arab League, accelerated their efforts to depose Assad.

The weekend saw a meeting of Arab League foreign ministers in Qatar calling for Assad to step down. The secretary general of the Arab League, Nabil Elaraby, told the *al-Hayat* newspaper, “There is now no talk about political reform, but a transfer of power.”

Elaraby will soon travel to China and Russia with Qatar’s prime minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani. “Our message to the Russians will be, with clarity and frankness, that the veto decision they took is viewed as being against Arab interests,” he said.

The amount of money the Arab powers are flooding into Syria—always under a humanitarian pretext, but in fact funding the insurgency—is extraordinary. The Arab League has pledged an additional \$100 million to help Syrian refugees, while a fundraising campaign launched with a telethon by the Saudi royal family generated more than \$32 million in donations in just one day. Qatar has launched a similar initiative.

In an article highlighting the close coordination between the military-political efforts of the Arab powers and Washington, Israel’s *Haaretz* drew attention to the appointment of Prince Bandar as director general of the Saudi Intelligence Agency, on top of his post as secretary-general of the National Security Council.

It wrote that “the main reason for his appointment now is that Saudi Arabia is preparing for the next stage in Syria, after President Bashar Assad leaves the political stage one way or another and Syria becomes a battleground for influence.”

Haaretz continued: “Bandar is considered the CIA’s man in Riyadh,” with previous involvement in funding Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s and the mujahideen in Afghanistan. “Saudi commentators,” the newspaper wrote, “say Bandar was the one behind the decision to give money to the Syrian rebels, and even to buy weapons for them.”



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