

# French President Hollande meets US-backed Syrian “opposition”

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French Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande met with the new UN mediator for Syria, Kofi Annan's replacement, Lakhdar Brahimi, on Monday, before discussions Tuesday with officials of the Syrian National Council (SNC), the political wing of the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

After his interview with Lakhdar Brahimi, Hollande said that there could not be “any political solution [in Syria] without the removal from power of Bashar al-Assad.”

Hollande also met with the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad ben Khalifa al-Thani, to discuss Syria. The emir provided vast funding and arms for the anti-Gaddafi forces in the NATO war to topple the Libyan government last year, and Qatar is again providing funding and weapons for US-backed Syrian forces aiming to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Criticised by the French right-wing parties for being insufficiently active in support of anti-Assad forces, Hollande is anxious to show that he is energetically backing the US policy of regime change in Damascus, continuing in the footsteps of his conservative predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy. The aim of French and Western imperialism is to install a puppet regime in Syria, as a step to forcing regime change in Iran. This aims to break any barrier to Washington's neo-colonial remodelling of the oil-rich region in the interests of the US and its European allies.

There is growing evidence that the CIA is working with Al Qaeda forces in Syria to advance its aims. (See also: “Washington's proxy in Syria: Al Qaeda”)

After these discussions, in which he was accompanied by his foreign minister, the former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, Hollande encouraged the SNC “to organise a broad unification of all the opposition forces, in particular the local coordination networks, the

revolutionary councils and representatives of the Free Syrian Army”. He added, “The legitimate representatives of the new Syria will thus be able to prepare the transition to a democratic regime under the best possible conditions.”

He euphemistically called on the SNC delegation to “obtain the cessation of violence,” which in reality signifies the military crushing of the Syrian government by pro-US proxy forces. The day before Hollande met with FSA officials, moreover, US President Barack Obama announced plans for a US invasion of Syria. (See also: “Obama threatens to invade Syria”)

The declaration of SNC delegation member Burhan Ghalioun—the former SNC leader, and the chief professor of the Centre of Arab Studies at the New Sorbonne University-Paris 3—made clear that his final aim is the military destruction of the Assad regime. He said, “We want that bunch, that gang which governs Syria today, to disintegrate and leave power, full stop.”

Hollande's comments are designed to present the preparation for direct armed intervention by the US and its allies, as an autonomous national-democratic revolutionary movement. His reference to “local co-ordinations” and “revolutionary councils” is carefully worded to give “democratic” or even “left” legitimacy to the SNC and the FSA. Nonetheless, these organizations are primarily composed of Islamist politicians from the Muslim Brotherhood, former Baathists, and the periphery of assets of various Western intelligence agencies.

In an August 8 piece in *Le Monde*, Nora Benkorich, a doctoral student at the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), examined various organizations, such as the Local Coordinating Committees (LCC), that are often held up as the secular or “revolutionary” wing of the Syrian “opposition.”

Benkorich's report demolishes claims advanced by many on the French bourgeois and petty-bourgeois "left" that the LCC are independent from US-aligned, explicitly Islamist groups. She writes that the LCC have 10 representatives on the SNC. They work in collaboration with the FSA and "are for a limited international intervention."

She quotes Musab Al-Hamadee of the Hama town LCC: "We want the international community to realise that the Bashar Al-Assad regime only understands the language of violence, murder and bombs. ...We want it [the international community] to help the Syrian people to get rid of this regime by supplying arms and military support to the FSA, by setting up a military no-fly zone and carrying out targeted bombings."

Hollande's mention of "revolutionary councils" apparently refers to the General Commission of the Syrian Revolution (GCSR). Formed in August 2011, according to Benkorich it comprises some 150 local councils. It "claims an Islamic, spiritual, cultural and ethical heritage". Despite squabbles with the Muslim Brotherhood and the SNC, "negotiations are in progress for representatives to join the SNC", she reports.

She quotes a CGRS cadre from Rastan: "He and his group members are favourable to an indirect foreign intervention, which would involve a no-fly zone and material support for the FSA, like in Libya."



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