

Syrian army, US-backed opposition militias clash in Aleppo

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Fighting continued yesterday in the escalating US proxy war in Syria, as Western-backed militias hostile to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad fought Syrian Army forces in the northern city of Aleppo, near the Turkish border.

Western journalists reporting with the US-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) said that Syrian Army forces in Aleppo were bombarding the main city districts held by the “rebel” forces every 5 minutes. Syrian tank units southwest of Aleppo were reported to be shelling the Sunni-majority Salaheddin neighborhood and the nearby Seif al-Dawla district. There were also reports of clashes in the Hanano, Hamdaniyeh, and Al Bab neighborhoods in northeastern Aleppo.

Reporting from Aleppo, CNN correspondent Ben Wedeman said that people were going about their daily business in much of the rest of the city, however.

Aleppo, Syria’s commercial capital and the largest city in northern Syria, is emerging as a critical battleground in the US-led war to overthrow Assad. Washington and its allies—the Saudi and Qatari monarchies, the Turkish regime and the European NATO powers—are flooding the area with weapons and coordinating “rebel” operations from a nerve center in nearby Adana, Turkey, the site of Washington’s Incirlik air base. It has been widely reported, including in the Western media, that the “rebels” are being supported by Al Qaeda.

The *Tehran Times* wrote that the Syrian army had captured over 200 anti-Assad fighters, including some 70 foreign fighters.

Syrian officials claimed that Syrian Special Forces in Aleppo on Sunday captured Turkish and Saudi officers leading anti-Assad militias in Aleppo. They identified the Turkish officers as Sultan Oldu and Taher Amnitiu

and the Saudi officials as Abdel Wahed al-Thani, Abdel Aziz al-Matiri, Ahmad al-Hadi, Moussa al-Zahrani, and Firas al-Zahrani. The Turkish government denied the report.

These reports underscore the right-wing character of the US proxy war in Syria. The anti-Assad forces, largely Sunni Islamists from Syria or flown in through Turkey from other Middle Eastern countries, are relying on operational guidance, arms, money and diplomatic pressure from the imperialist powers to overcome their lack of mass support.

Writing from Aleppo, Tomas Avenarius of Germany’s *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* said last Friday: “I am skeptical when I hear claims the rebels control half the city... The trick of the rebels is to move around the city and then advance the claim that they have liberated large areas. But that does not mean that the Army of the regime will not return.”

He continued: “The FSA has, compared to the regime, far fewer fighters... It is not that all of Aleppo is burning. Certain neighborhoods are seeing brutal fighting and are constantly bombarded. There are also certain neighborhoods that are still calm, where one still sees people in normal areas.”

Avenarius noted the sectarian basis of the fighting and the “rebel” forces’ ability to control districts in Aleppo: “There were rumors that the rebels also wanted to assault a Christian neighborhood, not the Christians but loyalist soldiers that are stationed there. If this happened, I believe there would be much harder fighting. Many Christians feel threatened and would not automatically support the rebels. In the Sunni neighborhoods, people do not actively support the rebels, but many people sympathize with them. In the Christian neighborhoods it would be a different story.”

The civil war stoked by the US and its allies in Syria

is destabilizing the entire Middle East, threatening a regional war fought along sectarian lines.

Yesterday, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi arrived in Ankara to negotiate the release of 48 Iranians captured last week near Damascus by Sunni “rebel” forces. Iran claims they were a group of Shia pilgrims, including women and children, visiting a Shia holy site. But the anti-Assad forces claim they were Iranian soldiers backing Assad, an Iranian ally and follower of the Alawite faith, a branch of Shia Islam. There were unconfirmed reports that three of the Iranian hostages were killed yesterday.

While Turkey is threatening to invade Syria to crush Kurdish forces in northeast Syria, Iran has already warned that such an attack would activate Syria’s alliance with Iran—implicitly threatening a war between Iran and Turkey, a NATO member country.

Turkey has also declared seven zones of southeastern Turkey’s Hakkari province under military rule after attacks there were blamed on Kurdish fighters. Turkish citizens are not allowed to enter the area for two months, until October 6. Turkish strikes have already caused over 115 deaths among Kurdish fighters in the region. (See: Turkey attacks Kurds, threatens military action against Syria).

The Iranian Foreign Ministry also sent a formal diplomatic note to Washington saying that “due to its open support for Syrian terrorist groups” the US was responsible for the Iranian captives’ safety.

Commenting on the reports that three Iranian hostages had been killed, Iranian Speaker of the Parliament Ali Larijani said that if Iranian hostages were harmed “the Iranian nation will not ignore these crimes.” He said the hostages’ captors would receive a response from Iran “in due time.”

There were also protests in Lebanon demanding the release of eleven Lebanese hostages held by anti-Assad groups in Syria. The hostages’ families blocked the Beirut airport highway Monday evening to pressure the government to secure their release. Lebanese President Michel Sleiman said he had contacted Turkish and Qatari authorities to secure the hostages’ release.

It is ever more obvious that the US intervention in Syria, launched under the cynical guise of defending Syrian civilians against the Army, is a brutal imperialist operation threatening to plunge the entire region into war and civil war. An indication of the plans being

discussed in imperialist circles is provided by an article in Lebanon’s *Daily Star* by well-known Middle East journalist and commentator Dilip Hiro.

The article, entitled “Partition is a Viable Option for Syria,” notes that Syria’s “Alawites know that if the Assad regime collapses, they could be butchered by the Sunni victors.” It adds, “Many see no alternative to fighting for survival.”

As a result, Hiro writes, the “multifarious coalition of anti-Assad groups, united only by their hatred of the Alawite-dominated regime, could not cope with the aftermath of the collapse of the centralized Baathist state.”

Though he acknowledges that “The partition of British India was accompanied by roughly 1.5 million deaths and transfer of some 12 million people across the newly-demarcated international border,” Hiro nonetheless presents such a fate as a positive good for Syria. “The 1947 partitioning of British India into India and Pakistan,” he writes, “eased communal violence dramatically. And so Syria, too, could be on the way to a solution by partition... The end of such a conflict can be achieved by carving out an Alawite state wedged between Lebanon and Turkey. This could involve population exchange amid violence as happened in British India in 1947.”



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