

US, European powers press for intervention as Syrian army retakes Aleppo

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Politicians and the media in the United States and Europe stepped up demands for direct military intervention in Syria yesterday, as the Syrian army fought to expel US-backed forces from the city of Aleppo.

Syrian army forces reportedly captured much of the Salahuddin neighborhood in southwestern Aleppo, a Sunni-majority neighborhood that was a central base for the groups fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Some anti-Assad forces retired north towards the Sakkour district, though some reports stated that they continued to hold parts of Salahuddin.

Several hundred anti-Assad fighters were killed, amid reports that they were running low on ammunition and supplies.

Malek al-Kurdi, the deputy commander of the US-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA), told Voice of America: “We had wanted an active role from the international community to take a bold decision to stop the massacres in Syria. But the delay and the modest capacities of the Free Syrian Army have put the Syrian situation in a state of limbo.”

Syrian army units were also reportedly fighting north of Aleppo to cut off supply lines between the anti-Assad forces and Syria’s northern border with Turkey. Working with the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the European powers, Turkey is using the city of Adana—home of the US Incirlik air base—as a “nerve center” to reinforce the anti-Assad forces with munitions and foreign fighters. Al Qaeda forces play a critical role among the US-backed foreign fighters going to Syria (See also: Washington’s proxy in Syria: Al Qaeda).



The battle for Aleppo is particularly significant, given its strategic location next to Turkey and Aleppo’s role as a commercial center in the Syrian economy. The Syrian government must hold Aleppo if it is to prevent the United States and its allies from setting up bases in Syria along the Turkish border and resupplying their proxies with heavy weaponry.

Ruling circles in the United States and Europe have responded to their proxies’ setback in Aleppo by escalating calls for direct military intervention.

Yesterday, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy called for “rapid” foreign intervention in Syria to “avoid a massacre.” Sarkozy, who spearheaded last year’s NATO war in Libya, met with members of the US-backed Syrian National Council and issued a joint statement declaring that “there are great similarities with the Libyan crisis.”

Sarkozy’s intervention is highly unusual for a former French president, especially as Sarkozy had pledged to abandon public life after his defeat in May’s presidential elections. The move apparently caught the Socialist Party (PS) administration of President François Hollande off guard. Hollande’s policy was to continue covert support for the anti-Assad forces; like the Italian government, it recently sent medical teams to treat wounded FSA fighters.

Former British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind also

issued a statement calling for military support to the anti-Assad forces.

The *Washington Post* yesterday published an editorial, “Getting around a dead-end in Syria,” demanding US military action against Syria. Calling the Alawites leading the Syrian security forces a “broadly cohesive, hardcore fighting faction fighting an increasingly bitter, fierce, and naked struggle for collective survival,” it warned that Assad could fight indefinitely “unless the United States abandons its policy of passivity.”

The *Post* advocated arming the anti-Assad forces with anti-tank and anti-air weapons. It explained that this would increase Washington’s influence over anti-Assad forces, compared to the influence of Saudi Arabia and Islamist groups: “By refusing to step in, the Obama administration is merely ensuring that Syria’s future leaders will be more resistant to the West and perhaps more open to groups like Al Qaeda.”

Despite the *Post*’s intentions, its editorial lays bare the reactionary character of the US proxy war in Syria. Having armed reactionary forces like Al Qaeda as shock troops in a Sunni war against Syria’s Alawites, Washington sees no solution besides escalating the war.

The US is stoking a confrontation not only with the Assad regime, but with its key regional ally, Iran, and its Russian and Chinese backers. Yesterday the Iranian government hosted an international conference on Syria with Russian officials. Representatives of China, Algeria, Venezuela, India, Pakistan, and Tajikistan reportedly also attended the meeting.

Under these circumstances, it fell to *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof to fashion a “humanitarian” argument for Washington’s escalation of its reactionary proxy war in Syria. A spear-carrier for human-rights imperialism, Kristof wrote his most recent column, “Obama AWOL in Syria,” to demand that Obama organize a Libyan-style US intervention in Syria.

He began by recounting his visit to the Aspen Strategy Group, a Cold War think tank led by former Nixon and Bush administration advisor Lt. General Brent Scowcroft and former Assistant Defense Secretary Joseph Nye. Kristof wrote, “I’m struck by how many strategists whom I respect think it’s time to move more aggressively.”

These strategists include former Clinton administration Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and Defense Secretary William Perry, who called for a “no-fly, no-drive zone in northern Syria.” Characteristically, Kristof did not spell out what this entails. However, it would mean setting up a US intervention force to shoot down

any Syrian aircraft over Syria and destroy any Syrian vehicle moving in northern Syria without US approval; that is, it is an act of war.

Kristof explained, “There’s a humanitarian imperative. It appears that several times more people have been killed than in Libya when that intervention began, and the toll is rising steeply.”

This ambiguous phrase is consciously constructed to present US military aggression as an act of charity to limit civilian casualties. This is a contemptible lie, contradicted even by the casualty statistics that Kristof artfully does not present to his reader. Even the upper estimate of Syrian casualties presented by anti-Assad forces, at 20,000, stands well below the 50,000 killed in the US-led Libyan war, as NATO forces carpet-bombed Tripoli, Sirte, and other Libyan cities.

If the casualty total in Syria stands below the casualty count in Libya when NATO began bombing, this is because NATO intervened as fighting began in Libya, whereas the US has been stoking a bloody war fought by right-wing Sunni Islamist proxies in Syria for months. Should Washington begin bombing Syria—a far more populous country than Libya—casualties will soon mount beyond the massive death toll in Libya.

Kristof concludes, “Look, I’m no hawk. I was strongly against the Iraq war and the Afghan surge, and I’m firmly against today’s drift to war against Iran, But Syria, like Libya, is a rare case where we can take modest steps that stand a good chance of accelerating the fall of a dictator.”

Such comments only underscore the cynicism and dishonesty of the proponents of human rights imperialism. Proclaiming himself an opponent to “drift to war against Iran” and an advocate of “modest steps,” Kristof is promoting a deeply reactionary and bloody enterprise: US carpet-bombing of Syria, to bring victory to ultra-right Sunni forces in a sectarian war with Iran’s main Middle East ally, the Assad regime.



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