

Clinton visits Turkey to step up Syrian proxy war

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Visiting Istanbul, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that Washington and the Turkish government would work together on a “range of contingencies” to back the armed Syrian opposition and prepare for the ouster of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

“Our number one goal is to hasten the end of the bloodshed and the Assad regime,” Clinton said at a Saturday press conference with her Turkish counterpart, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.

“What the minister and I agreed to was to have very intensive operational planning,” Clinton said, adding that US “intelligence services, our military have very important responsibilities and roles to play.”

Asked by journalists about the operations that the US might consider, Secretary Clinton confirmed that a no-fly zone over parts of Syria was a possibility that required “greater in-depth analysis.”

At the same press conference, Davutoglu stressed that his government would take steps to intervene more assertively in Syria. “The international community needs to take some very decisive steps to stop” the bloodshed, Davutoglu said.

The day before the meeting in Istanbul, the US Treasury announced that it was tightening the economic noose around Syria, with additional sanctions put in place against the state oil company, Sytrol, for trading with Iran.

This weekend, Britain and France also announced that they would send increased “humanitarian” and “non-lethal” supplies to the Syrian opposition.

UK foreign secretary William Hague described Assad as “doomed” and promised that £5 million worth of medical and communications equipment, including satellite phones and radar systems, would go to “rebel” groups.

In a clear *quid pro quo* for Turkey’s role at the frontline of US plans for regime change in Damascus, Clinton thanked Davutoglu for his government’s “leadership” in the region. She promised that the US would not allow the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) to use Syria as a base to launch attacks into Turkey.

The PKK, a Kurdish separatist movement banned by the Turkish government and branded a terrorist organization by the US State Department, has been involved in a decades-long conflict with Ankara over the Kurdish-majority region of southeast Turkey. In recent weeks, there have been numerous reports that the PKK is assisting Syrian Kurdish militants opposed to both the Assad regime and the US-backed Free Syrian Army.

The hypocrisy of Clinton’s condemnation of the PKK as “terrorists”—following a meeting in which the US and Turkish governments had just discussed their ongoing sponsorship of Islamist militant groups in Syria, some with links to Al Qaeda—went without comment from the media assembled in Istanbul for the press conference.

Washington, its European allies, Turkey, and the Gulf sheikdoms have backed various Islamist militias in Syria with large quantities of arms, communications equipment, and funds, as well as training, intelligence and political guidance. The escalation of the opposition’s conflict with the Assad dictatorship has resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians and turned hundreds of thousands of families into refugees.

In its proxy war, Washington has relied on Sunni fundamentalist militias, including fighters from other countries. These foreign Islamist cadres reportedly include veterans of the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Libya.

A portrait of these anti-Assad “rebels” appeared in the *Washington Post* August 9. The piece, titled “Syrian rebels driven by religion, but on their own terms,” describes one fighter, a 29-year-old Syrian using the *nom de guerre* Abu Berri, who describes himself as a “committed member of the Salafists, the ultraconservative Sunni sect.”

The article then depicts an armed conflict in Syria by Salafists and other Islamists, involving a “growing number of fighters from other Arab and Muslim countries, including Iraqis who belong to Al Qaeda.”

The *Post*, which like every other major media outlet in the US has embraced the official rhetoric of the US “war on terror” for the past decade, reports that “[t]he black flag of al-Qaeda” flies in parts of Syria, which is “becoming a magnet for global jihadists.”

No explanation has ever been made by the Obama administration to reconcile US support for Syrian “rebels” infiltrated by Al Qaeda with the claims made since the 9/11 attacks regarding the supposed worldwide threat posed by Al Qaeda.

The rhetoric of the “war on terror” was and remains a pack of lies used by the US ruling class to justify waging wars for oil in the Middle East and Central Asia, while gutting democratic rights within the United States. Al Qaeda is only the enemy when it suits Washington’s strategic interests. Now, it acts as US imperialism’s shock troops in Syria (see: “Washington’s proxy in Syria: Al Qaeda”).

After the recent defeat of US-backed forces in the northern city of Aleppo, US planners are preparing to intensify operations, hoping that the Syrian army has already been severely weakened and its morale undermined.

Gerhard Schindler, the head of Germany’s BND intelligence agency, assessed the impact of the civil war

on Syria’s armed forces, especially after the heavy fighting in Aleppo. Speaking to *Die Welt* newspaper last week, Schindler stated that “[t]here are a lot of indications that the end game for the [Syrian] regime has begun.”

“The regular army is being confronted by a variety of flexible fighters,” the German spy chief said. “The recipe of [the opposition fighters’] success is their guerilla tactics. They’re breaking the army’s back.”

The Assad government’s temporary victory over the militants in Aleppo has not resulted in any let-up in opposition attacks across the country. Over the weekend, Syrian state TV reported that two bombs were set off in Damascus, one in the Marjeh district and the other near the Tishrin athletics stadium.

Another alleged terrorist attack on a bus in the city of Hama resulted in the deaths of six passengers.

The US could use one of a number of flash points to justify a direct military intervention against Syria. Turkey, a member of the US-led NATO military alliance, has moved large numbers of troops and military hardware to the border region, and any instance of fighting between its troops and Syrian armed forces could trigger a full-scale war in which Ankara calls upon its NATO allies for assistance.

In addition, there were reports of fighting between the Jordanian army and Syrian troops along the border on Saturday. However, an Assad government source told Russia’s Itar-TASS news agency that the clash was between Syrian soldiers and rebel militants.

The Jordanian monarchy is a close ally of the US and Israel, and the Assad regime has claimed that foreign Islamist fighters are entering Syria from Jordan. Tensions between the two countries rose after the defection of the former prime minister of Syria, Riad Hijab, to Amman last week.



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