

# Obama threatens to invade Syria

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Yesterday US and NATO officials discussed plans for a US military invasion of Syria to bring down Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, after US President Barack Obama announced that the US was contemplating a direct attack on Syria at a press conference Monday night.

A delegation led by Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Beth Jones discussed US military plans with Turkey. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said that Defense Department and US intelligence officials met their Turkish counterparts “to share operational pictures, to talk about the effectiveness of what we’re doing now, and about what more we can do.”

Senior US officials said that contingency plans for US intervention in Syria include scenarios requiring tens of thousands of American troops.

At a press conference at the White House Monday, Obama declared: “I have indicated repeatedly that President al-Assad has lost legitimacy, that he needs to step down. So far, he hasn’t gotten the message, and instead has double downed in violence on his own people. The international community has sent a clear message that rather than drag his country into civil war he should move in the direction of a political transition. But at this point, the likelihood of a soft landing seems pretty distant.”

Obama said that he would order “military engagement” if chemical or biological weapons are moved or used in Syria. He said that Syria’s alleged stockpile of chemical weapons “concerns our close allies in the region, including Israel. It concerns us. We cannot have a situation in which chemical or biological weapons are falling into the hands of the wrong people.”

Obama added that the US “have communicated in no uncertain terms with every player in the region, that that’s a red line for us, and that there would be

enormous consequences if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front, or the use of chemical weapons.”

The cynicism with which Obama is seeking to justify the next US imperialist aggression in the Middle East is staggering. The main groups in Syria who could seize chemical weapons from Syrian government stockpiles are Al Qaeda forces promoted by the US and its allies as shock troops against Assad. (See also: “Washington’s proxy in Syria: Al Qaeda”)

Having armed Al Qaeda-linked groups and sent them into Syria to carry out bombings and assassinations, the US and its allies now plan to justify their invasion of Syria by citing the need to protect the world’s population from Al Qaeda’s terrorist atrocities!

The Obama administration advances its arguments today with total disregard for the fact that they clash with the lies used until now to justify its support for Sunni anti-Assad “rebels.”

For months it maintained the pretense that it would not directly attack Syria, and that the Syrian regime’s statements that it was fighting US-backed terrorists were “propaganda.” Now, the White House is admitting that terrorist groups play a major role in the anti-Assad forces, and citing this as a pretext for war.

By proceeding in this fashion, the Obama administration demonstrates its complete contempt for the American electorate, which voted him into office in 2008 in large part based on hopes he would stop the US military aggressions against countries in the Middle East. Today, as during the 2003 invasion of Syria’s neighbor, Iraq, Washington is preparing to invade a country based on cynical lies about weapons of mass destruction.

A US invasion of Syria would be a crime of historic proportions, like the war in Iraq—a country whose population is only slightly larger than Syria’s. This war led to the deaths of over a million Iraqis and thousands

of US and allied soldiers. Iraq became a battleground for US occupation forces, as well as Sunni and Shiite death squads that carried out sectarian bombings and massacres.

A US invasion would threaten similar carnage inside Syria, which is already being torn apart by sectarian fighting in which Washington is working with right-wing regimes in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to back Sunni Islamist forces against Syria's Alawite regime. However, the far greater tensions in a region already destabilized by a decade of US and Israeli wars in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Libya now threaten to spread the violence over the entire Middle East.

Sectarian bloodshed provoked by the intensifying US intervention in the region is already spilling over into Syria's neighbors. On Tuesday four people were killed and more than 60 wounded in firefights between Sunni Muslims and Shiite Alawites in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli. Tensions in Lebanon have been growing for months, with Western-backed forces seeking to provoke the Lebanese government which is led by the Shiite organization Hizbollah, a close ally of Syria and Iran.

A US war against Syria would be the next step in an ongoing campaign by US imperialism to deepen its hegemony over the energy-rich and geo-strategically vital regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

The Syrian regime responded to US threats with warnings and proposals for negotiations. Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Qadri Jamil described Obama's statements about chemical weapons as a pretext for Western intervention in Syria. "The West is looking for an excuse for direct intervention. If this excuse does not work, it will look for another excuse." He warned that an attack on Syria would turn the conflict into a regional war, saying: "Those who are contemplating this evidently want to see the crisis expand beyond Syria's borders."

Jamil announced that the Syrian regime is willing to talk with the opposition to work out a transition, however. He even declared that Assad's presidency is negotiable, stating: "We are ready to discuss Assad's resignation—but not as precondition."

Obama's war threats against Syria are also deepening tensions with Russia and China, who have already vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions backed by the US and its Western and Arab allies aiming to

give a pseudo-legal fig leaf for US aggression against Syria.

Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov spoke at a meeting in Moscow with China's State Councilor Dai Bingguo, who also met Russian President Vladimir Putin and his top security adviser, Nikolai Patrushev, on Monday. Lavrov said that both Russia and China base their diplomatic cooperation on "the need to strictly adhere to the norms of international law and the principles contained in the U.N. Charter, and not to allow their violation."

Lavrov said that only the Security Council has the authority to approve the use of external force against Syria, warning against imposing "democracy by bombs." Russian officials have reportedly stated that they hope to avoid a repetition of the attack on Libya last year. Moscow abstained from the Security Council vote on Libya, and a resolution was passed which was subsequently used by NATO to justify its bombing of the country.



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