

French President Hollande calls for formation of Syrian opposition government

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Yesterday, at a conference of France's ambassadors held in Paris, newly-elected French President François Hollande called for the US-backed Syrian opposition parties to form a government, which he said France would recognize.

Hollande's move comes one week after US President Barack Obama threatened to invade Syria if Syrian President Bashar al-Assad appeared ready to use chemical weapons against US-backed anti-Assad fighters. This marked the first open threat of direct military intervention into Syria by the imperialist powers. Until then, they had organized the funding and arming of their proxy forces, largely Sunni Islamist fighters, through the offices of the Saudi and Qatari monarchies and the Turkish government.

Hollande's comments addressed a range of international issues, but centered on the crisis in Syria and the Middle East. They amount to an official declaration by the French government, worked out with Washington, that it is pursuing regime-change by military force in Syria.

Hollande said: "France is asking the Syrian opposition to form a provisional government that will be both inclusive and representative, that can become the legitimate representative of the new Syria. We will work with our Arab partners to accelerate this process, and France will recognize the provisional government of the new Syria as soon as it is formed."

US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland echoed Hollande's proposal. Speaking of the Syrian opposition, she said: "So that's the first order of business—for them to all agree on what a transition ought to look like. Obviously, it's a matter for them to decide if and when they may be prepared to start naming folks."

This amounts to a plan for Paris, backed by

Washington and its other imperialist allies, to impose a new government on Syria that has no popular legitimacy. The anti-Assad forces—comprised of Sunni Islamist militias, various petty-bourgeois "left" groups, and international Islamist terrorist groups affiliated to Al Qaeda—are deeply internally divided and unpopular, especially in Syria's major cities, Damascus and Aleppo.

Hollande's proposal is all the more brazen in that France is the former colonial power in Syria. It ruled the country when the League of Nations put it under French mandate in 1920 until shortly after the end of World War II, during which it was briefly controlled by the fascist Vichy regime.

Hollande made clear that he plans to carry out this policy by force of arms, aiding the proxy war by anti-Assad forces in Syria. He said: "We are helping notably those who are organizing the liberated zones on Syrian territory. We are working on the buffer zones proposed by Turkey. We are doing it with our closest partners."

These proposals involve offering the military protection of France, Turkey, or their allies to anti-Assad forces, so they can seize parts of Syria's territory and hold it against the Syrian government. Despite the euphemistic terminology, Hollande's proposal is objectively an act of war, attacking Syria's territorial integrity with the threat, or the use, of military force.

With his allusion to France's "closest partners," Hollande left no doubt that his declaration had been discussed with the United States.

Towards the beginning of his speech, moreover, he said: "Alliances, yes, we have one with the United States, and this relation today is marked by confidence. I have had the opportunity to note with President Obama the magnitude of our agreement on the major international questions, the economic crisis, and the

imperative of [economic] growth.”

Hollande also echoed Obama’s threat of military intervention in Syria: “We remain very vigilant with our allies to prevent the use of chemical weapons by the regime, which would constitute for the international community a legitimate cause for direct intervention.”

The invocation of the threat of chemical weapons is no less cynical than Hollande’s concern for the human rights of the Syrian people, who routinely face bombings and shootings organized by Islamist forces armed to the teeth by the NATO powers and their Middle East allies. Even though the US proxy war has lasted for over a year, the Assad government has not used chemical weapons. Moreover, it has pledged not to use them against Syrians.

Far from being politically legitimate, the actions of the United States government and its European allies are fundamentally criminal. They are attempting to impose upon an ex-colonial country an unrepresentative and lawless government, which will be dependent on its ties with world finance capital and the military might of its imperialist backers.

One indication of the class character of such a regime is the record of the Libyan regime installed last year at the end of the NATO war in Libya, in a proxy war similar to the one now being waged in Syria.

Despite elections held on July 7, the country is still wracked by violence between the competing regional, tribal, and Islamist militias who served as NATO’s proxies in the war against the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Libyan Interior Minister Fawzi Abdel Al was recently forced to resign over allegations of complicity in the desecration of Sufi shrines and the burning of libraries by ultraconservative Sunni Islamists.

As it resumed consular services in Libya on Monday, the US State Department advised American citizens that it was too dangerous to visit: “The Department of State warns US citizens against all but essential travel to Libya. The incidence of violent crime, especially carjacking and robbery, has become a serious problem. In addition, political violence in the form of assassinations and vehicle bombs has increased in both Benghazi and Tripoli.”

Taken from the standpoint of international law, moreover, the military operations envisaged by Obama and Hollande in Syria are illegal unless approved by the

UN Security Council. As Russia and China have vetoed all Security Council resolutions that could approve military action, it is completely unclear how Hollande could obtain legal sanction for aggression against the Assad regime.

Hollande himself somewhat obliquely addressed this issue by implying that France might seek to simply avoid the requirement of Security Council approval—as the Bush administration did in 2003, during the illegal US invasion of Iraq.

He said: “It is necessary—and that is the question posed today—for the Security Council members to live up to their responsibilities and allow the Security Council to take decisions. If a system becomes blocked, one either goes around it or it becomes powerless.”

Hollande continued by criticizing Russia and China and calling for “reform of the Security Council, to admit new permanent and non-permanent members.”

In addition to the lawlessness of international politics, Hollande’s comments point to the deep decay and crisis of democracy inside Europe. Elected on the basis of popular hostility to the policies of war and social austerity of his predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy, Hollande is now pressing ahead with even vaster wars, as a junior partner of US imperialism.



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