

Mounting evidence of US plans for military intervention against Syria

Chris Marsden
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Yesterday, *Military.Com* reported that 400 US and Dutch NATO troops were already “massed on Turkey’s Syrian border...readying Patriot missiles three days after NATO agreed to deploy the MIM-104 Patriot surface-to-air missile system in Turkey.”

This follows the announcement this week by Germany, which is supplying two of three missile systems to Turkey, along with one from the Netherlands, that it will dispatch 170 troops to Syria’s border.

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle have both alleged that the regime of Syrian President Bashar al Assad is actively considering the use of chemical weapons against its opponents, a move defined as a “red line” by Washington. On Monday, President Barack Obama said the use of chemical weapons is “totally unacceptable” and would have “consequences.”

Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad yesterday reiterated, “Syria stresses again, for the 10th, the 100th time, that if we had such weapons, they would not be used against our people. We would not commit suicide.”

The unsubstantiated claims that Syria intends to do so are as transparent a pretext for an act of military aggression by the NATO powers as were the lies a decade ago about Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction.” The US has made extensive preparations for an intervention that has nothing to do with the “intelligence” it claims to possess regarding chemical weapons.

As previously reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*, Washington has deployed a naval armada off Syria’s coast spearheaded by the USS Eisenhower carrier strike group and including an amphibious battle group consisting of the USS Iwo Jima, the USS New

York and the USS Gunston Hall, which carry a contingent of 2,500 US Marines.

This brings 17 warships, 70 fighter-bombers and 10,000 military personnel within striking distance of Syria, in addition to the Air Force’s 39th Air Base Wing, stationed at the Incirlik base in Turkey, and tens of thousands of US ground troops deployed in Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Germany’s troop dispatch to Turkey follows last month’s call by its Foreign Ministry for a “rapid reactivation” of the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) on Egypt’s Rafah border, and for Egypt to receive EU help in equipping its border police, supposedly to stop weapons smuggling into Gaza.

The far more substantial US build-up is in line with plans drawn up by the Pentagon estimating that a full-scale military intervention against Syria would require 75,000 US troops. But another possible option was detailed by French magazine *Le Point* this week. It stated that there is already a planned mission for Syria involving France that would involve a relatively small number of Special Forces from a number of NATO countries, and which is modelled on the Western intervention in Libya. The intervention would combine an aerial blitz with ground action by Special Forces to destroy chemical weapons stocks and Syria’s air force and air defence systems.

The French report received confirmation Friday from DEBKAFfile, which cited sources close to the French Defence Ministry of an imminent combined Western-Arab military intervention involving the US, France, Britain, Turkey, Jordan and other anti-Assad Arab states. DEBKAFfile, which is close to Israeli military and intelligence sources, identified Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar as being among these.

DEBKAFfile noted that “the French aircraft carrier

Charles De Gaulle, carrying a complement of marines, is deployed in the Mediterranean, having joined the USS Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group and at least five British warships which are also carrying a large marine force.”

It continued: “In the second and third weeks of November, British and French naval forces, plus 2,600 special ops combatants from both nations, performed landing-and-capture exercises against fortified locations on the coast and mountains of Albania as practice for potential operations against similar terrain in Syria, where the Alawite Mountains loom over the coastal towns of Latakia and Tartus.”

Also yesterday, *Le Figaro* reported that French military advisers have met with Syrian opposition fighters inside the country in order to identify possible recipients for weapons supplies. French agents held face-to-face talks with a Free Syrian Army leader “in the area between Damascus and Lebanon,” it quoted an unnamed leader of the Syrian opposition saying. They wanted to determine the “operational capacity of each group” and their “political colours,” he said. US and British agents had also held meetings, the source added.

An unnamed French military source confirmed the meetings had taken place.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is playing a pivotal role in urging a military response. Speaking in Belfast yesterday, she urged a “concerted push” to halt the Syrian conflict, but added that there had been no “great breakthrough” during talks in Dublin on Thursday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

The meeting with Lavrov and United Nations-Arab League special envoy on Syria Lakhdar Brahimi was the latest attempt to persuade Moscow to ditch its oldest ally in the Middle East, which allows it to operate a military base at Tartus. Speculation was rife as to how to interpret the statements made by Lavrov accepting Turkey’s right to self-defence. But he also insisted that “Syria is not Libya”, hoped “there will be no foreign interference” and urged negotiations.

Russia’s ambassador to NATO, Alexander Grushko, criticized the deployment of US-made Patriot missiles on the Turkey-Syria border as proof that NATO “is getting involved in the conflict after all” on the pretext of “provocations or some incidents on the [Turkey-Syria] border.”

Yesterday, Turkish government sources confirmed

that Turkey and Russia have agreed to work on a plan for “political change” in Syria. However, a Turkish source said that there was not agreement on what to do next as “Russia insists on a Syrian-owned process.”

Whether or not Russia abandons Assad, the situation is moving towards NATO intervention—most probably in support of Turkey and/or an Arab proxy force. Clinton is to travel to Marrakesh, Morocco next week for a meeting of the Friends of Syria group that will be attended by the newly formed Syrian National Coalition. “Now that there is a new opposition formed, we are going to be doing what we can to support that opposition,” Clinton told reporters in Brussels.

The destabilisation of Syria is aimed at isolating Iran and securing US hegemony over the oil-rich region. But such plans bring Washington into a yet more dangerous conflict with Russia and also China. Prior to meeting with Lavrov Thursday, Clinton told reporters that the US is determined to prevent Russia from recreating a new version of the Soviet Union in Central Asia and Eastern Europe using the “ruse” of economic integration.

“There is a move to re-Sovietise the region,” she said. “It’s not going to be called that. It’s going to be called a customs union, it will be called Eurasian Union and all of that. But let’s make no mistake about it. We know what the goal is and we are trying to figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it.”



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