

Syria in the crosshairs

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The United States and the major European powers this week have taken a number of steps to more directly intervene in the bloody sectarian civil war they have stoked in Syria, with the aim of bringing down the government of Bashar al-Assad.

Syria—which has seen tens of thousands killed and faces economic catastrophe as a result of the US-backed operation—is now the latest in a long series of countries to face the prospect of American bombardment.

On Friday, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced that the American military would begin deployment of Patriot missile batteries along with 400 US troops along the Turkish-Syrian border. They will be joined by 400 German and 360 Dutch soldiers to operate additional missile batteries.

While deployed under the pretext of “defense” against a possible Syrian attack on Turkey, the move is, in fact, a significant escalation of the US war drive. The missile systems can be used against warplanes and missiles to provide air cover for oppositional forces or establish a “no-fly” zone along the border, both precursors to direct military action.

The move comes only days after a meeting of the “Friends of Syria” in Morocco, in which the major powers, including the US, gave official blessing to the “National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.” The group was cobbled together only a month ago by the Obama administration for the purpose of being anointed the official government.

By declaring the National Coalition the “legitimate representative” of the Syrian people, the imperialist powers are adopting a policy of escalating the bloody sectarian war until complete victory—the toppling of the Syrian government and its replacement with a government more amenable to the aims of Washington.

Once again, an entire society is being destroyed. The sectarian civil war in Syria—in which fundamentalist

Sunni Islamic groups aligned with the US are playing an increasingly decisive role—has already led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people. An estimated two million people have been turned into refugees, with hundreds of thousands fleeing the country.

Syria, a relatively advanced country with one of the highest life expectancies in the Middle East, is being driven relentlessly backwards. The Institute for International Finance estimated earlier this week that the economy will shrink by 20 percent in 2012 as a result of the war and international sanctions.

Inflation has soared to 40 percent, with a corresponding collapse in purchasing power. Social infrastructure is in a state of collapse. Hunger is rampant. Bread is increasingly scarce. Millions are unable to heat their homes due to the cost of fuel. Dozens of hospitals have been shut down or lack basic supplies.

Principal responsibility for this situation lies with the imperialist powers. Since the initial eruption of anti-Assad protests in early 2011, the US has worked relentlessly to advance its own interests, relying on the most right-wing and reactionary forces, including Al Qaeda-linked organizations, led by the Al Nusra Front. Earlier this week, the Front organized car bombings in Damascus that killed at least 24 civilians, including a large number of children.

The utter cynicism of the US operation is hard to convey. For more than a decade, the central ideological framework of US policy—used to justify war abroad and the assault on democratic rights at home—has been the “war on terror.” Yet the American military and CIA are now in a de facto alliance with Al Qaeda in Syria, as they were in Libya in 2011. Washington’s move to officially designate the Al Nusra Front as a “terrorist organization” is intended in part to cover over the fact that it has worked closely with the organization for months, helping build it up into the most important

fighting force of the “rebels.”

The conflict that the US has stoked threatens to devolve into brutal sectarian killings, accompanied by NATO bombs. The tens of thousands dead already will rise quickly into the hundreds of thousands.

The criminality of American imperialism goes beyond anything seen since the operations of Nazi Germany in the run-up to World War II. One country after the next is targeted for overthrow on the basis of the most brazen lies: Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. And this is only the beginning. Due in particular to its alliance with Iran, Syria is seen as a “linchpin” in a broader drive to redraw the borders of the Middle East and strengthen the position of the US in relation to its main geopolitical competitors.

The Obama administration is at the same time engaged in a global campaign of drone strikes and illegal assassination targeting Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and other countries. Africa is a growing sphere of operations. The US is seeking to encircle China through a refocus of military forces in Southeast Asia. There is not part of the world that the American ruling class considers outside its “sphere of influence.”

The American ruling class feels it can operate with such brazen criminality due to the fact that the official “antiwar” organizations have become, through the vehicle of the Obama administration, integrated into the bourgeois political establishment and have emerged as among the most fervent supporters of intervention. What passes for the “left” has given its support to the “Syrian Revolution,” a revolution stoked by the CIA and spearheaded by Al Qaeda.

However, the official political establishment rests on very narrow foundations. At home as well as abroad, the ruling class is implementing a deeply unpopular policy. A halt to unending war and the catastrophe it portends depends upon the independent political mobilization of the working class in the fight for socialism.

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