

# Hands off Syria!

Bill Van Auken  
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Starting a two-day visit to Israel on Wednesday, US President Barack Obama issued bellicose threats against both Syria and Iran. The visit, which plainly has the character of a US-Israeli war council, makes clear that ten years after the US invasion of Iraq, US imperialism is preparing even greater crimes in the Middle East.

The Democratic president threatened the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad that it would “be held accountable for the use of chemical weapons or their transfer to terrorists,” adding that if evidence showed that such a weapon had been used it would be a “game-changer.”

On Iran, Obama repeated his vow “to prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon” and that “all options are on the table,” while recognizing Israel’s “right” to take unilateral action against Iran. There “is not a lot of daylight” between the US and Israel on Iran, he said.

Obama’s remarks came one day after the tenth anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq. No speeches or ceremonies were organized by the Obama administration or the US Congress Tuesday to mark the onset of a war to which 1.5 million Americans were sent, and where nearly 4,500 died and hundreds of thousands suffered either physical or psychological wounds.

Silence, in this case, denotes guilt. Both political parties, every branch of government, the media and the US corporations were directly complicit in what unquestionably stands as the greatest war crime of the 21st century: an unprovoked war, launched on the basis of lies, against a virtually defenseless nation, claiming some one million lives and leaving an entire society in ruins.

America’s ruling elite is now pressing for even greater and more destructive conflicts, in the face of mass public opposition to war. In Orwellian fashion, familiar and discredited pretexts of “weapons of mass

destruction,” terrorism and the promotion of “democracy” are being recycled, this time to justify war against Syria.

On Capitol Hill there was a drumbeat of calls for new Middle East wars. Adm. James Stavridis, the chief of the Pentagon’s European Command, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee Tuesday on extensive planning by NATO for intervention in Syria. “We are looking at a wide range of operations, and we are prepared if called upon to be engaged as we were in Libya,” he said.

Under serious consideration, according to Stavridis, is the establishment of a “no-fly zone.” Calls for such a no-fly zone in Libya, approved by the United Nations Security Council in March 2011, led to a US-NATO bombing campaign and war for regime change.

The committee’s chairman, Senator Carl Levin, (Democrat, Michigan) led the questioning. The day before, he had spoken at the Council on Foreign Relations, calling for the establishment of “a protected zone along the Turkish-Syrian border” and the use of military force to “go after some Syrian air defenses and after some of the Syrian air power.”

Resolutions were introduced in both the House and the Senate calling for stepped-up arming and training of Western-backed “rebels” fighting to overthrow Assad.

Meanwhile, the apparent use of a chemical weapon that claimed the lives of over 30 Syrians Tuesday prompted renewed demands for direct US intervention on Capitol Hill.

The Syrian government charged that the Western-backed fighters fired the rocket carrying the chemical warhead. By all accounts, the device hit a government-controlled village outside of Aleppo. Opposition sources said that most of the victims were Syrian government soldiers, while sources in Syria described them as Alawite civilians, a population that largely supports Assad.

Lawmakers invoked Obama's earlier threats that the use of chemical weapons in Syria represented a "red line" that would prompt US intervention. "If today's reports are substantiated, the President's red line has been crossed, and we would urge him to take immediate action to impose the consequences he has promised," Republican Senators Lindsey Graham and John McCain said in a joint statement.

Graham went further in an interview, calling for sending US ground troops into Syria to secure its chemical weapons, an operation that the Pentagon estimated would require 75,000 soldiers and Marines.

The twisted logic of this campaign is that the two-year-old sectarian civil war that the US and its allies in Europe, Turkey and the Persian Gulf monarchies have fomented, funded and armed has weakened the Assad regime to such an extent that its chemical weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists.

However, these terrorists, such as the Al Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra and other jihadist militias, are the principal shock troops of the Western-backed war for regime change.

As for the claim that Washington is promoting "democracy" in Syria, there could be no more telling refutation than the "election" Monday of the prime minister for a new "interim government" to be installed on Syrian territory seized by the so-called rebels. The winner, chosen by barely 35 members of a Syrian National Council formed under the tutelage of the US State Department, was Ghassan Hitto. A US citizen and Texas-based IT executive, he left Syria as a 17-year-old over 30 years ago.

The ideological pretexts for a US war in Syria are even less coherent than the ones used to carry out the war in Iraq a decade ago. The real driving forces are the same. What is involved is a predatory war aimed at redrawing the map of the Middle East to suit the interests of US imperialism and assure its hegemony over the region's energy resources. War for regime change in Syria is part of a broader campaign for war with Iran and carries with it the threat of drawing in Russia and China, as well.

While the American ruling establishment may want to bury the memory of the Iraq war, working people have drawn their own conclusions, with poll after poll showing the overwhelming view that it should never have been fought.

The attempt to foist a new war on the American people, using the same warmed-over lies, comes together with a deepening assault on jobs and living standards and continuous revelations of the criminality of the financial aristocracy, in whose interests these wars are fought. Such a volatile mixture is a recipe for social explosions within the United States and the development of a mass political movement against imperialist wars in Iraq, Syria and beyond.



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