

# US pledges to arm Syrian opposition as new terror bombing hits Damascus

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Senior Obama administration officials announced yesterday that the United States will directly arm the Islamist opposition fighting to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. This came as another terror bombing hit the Syrian capital, Damascus, amid a wave of bombings carried out by the US-backed opposition.

Reports of the shift in US policy to directly arming the so-called rebels followed a White House press conference at which President Barack Obama indicated a determination that Syria had used chemical weapons would lead to war, calling such a finding a “game changer.” Clearly alluding to military intervention, he stated that “as early as last year I asked the Pentagon, our military, our intelligence officials to prepare for me what options might be available.”

Taking a page from the Bush administration’s lying “weapons of mass destruction” propaganda in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, Obama is using completely unsubstantiated charges of chemical weapons use by the Assad regime as a pretext for an escalation of the US-orchestrated war for regime-change that has already killed tens of thousands of Syrians and turned a million more into refugees.

In an article entitled “Obama preparing to send arms to Syrian rebels,” the *Washington Post* web site quoted administration officials as follows: “We’re clearly on an upward trajectory. We’ve moved over to assistance that has a direct military purpose.” The *New York Times* posted a similar report under the headline “US Considers Expanding Support for Syrian Rebels by Supplying Guns.”

Late yesterday, US National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden confirmed that Obama “has directed his national security team to identify additional measures so that we can continue to increase our assistance.”

US officials also said they would seek to persuade Russian President Vladimir Putin to drop his support for the Assad regime.

These announcements end Washington’s pretense that it is not itself providing military support to opposition fighters, including the Al Nusra Front, which has pledged loyalty to Al Qaeda, but is only allowing its Middle Eastern allies to do so in its place.

It is well known that the opposition is led by Al Qaeda elements. The *New York Times* recently reported, “Rebel-held areas are dotted with Islamic courts staffed by lawyers and clerics, and by fighting brigades led by extremists...Nowhere in rebel-controlled Syria is there a secular fighting force to speak of.”

Washington designated the Al Nusra Front a terrorist organization last December, noting that it had already carried out nearly 600 terror bombings in Syria “in which numerous innocent Syrians have been injured and killed.” (See: “Washington discovers terrorists in Syria”).

US officials did not spell out what further assistance they will provide. However, Syrian opposition forces have in the past requested US anti-tank and surface-to-air missiles. The implications of giving such weapons to Al Qaeda-type forces in the Syrian opposition were underscored by reports yesterday that a Russian civilian airliner flying over Syria was targeted by anti-aircraft fire.

At his press conference, Obama declared that “we have established international law and international norms that say when you use these kinds of weapons, you have the potential of killing massive numbers of people in the most inhumane way possible.”

Obama’s invocation of “international law” is cynical and repugnant. His administration is the biggest violator of international law on the planet, its crimes

including drone assassinations that have killed thousands in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia; the abduction of alleged terrorists and their transfer to allied regimes and CIA black sites to be tortured; the illegal detention, abuse and torture of alleged terrorists at Guantanamo and other US prisons around the world; and the adoption of a policy of preemptive war, i.e., aggressive war against current or potential rivals of US imperialism.

Obama is hypocritically invoking international law to justify the escalation of a war that Washington has pursued in large measure through terrorist bombings carried out by its proxy forces in Syria. The operational alliance between the US and Al Qaeda underscores the criminal character of US foreign policy and the political fraud of the so-called “war on terror.”

In his press conference, Obama proposed to wait before directly invading Syria, citing opposition from US allies in the region. Noting that allegations of Syrian chemical weapons use remained unproven, he added: “when I am making decisions about America’s national security and the potential for taking additional action in response to chemical weapon use, I’ve got to make sure I’ve got the facts.”

Sections of the US media criticized Obama for not moving more aggressively, braying for an immediate war. Richard Cohen, a liberal columnist at the *Washington Post*, compared Obama to the “Cowardly Lion in the *Wizard of Oz*,” writing: “His plan, if it can be called one, is to let events force his hand. He’s issued red lines and virtual ultimatums, so sooner or later he’ll have to do something.”

Neither Obama nor any member of the White House press corps mentioned the latest terror bombing earlier that day in Damascus, when a powerful car bomb detonated on Martyrs’ Square, killing 14 people and wounding over 70. The blast, which reportedly came at a time of day when the square would be filled with people, shattered storefronts and set cars ablaze. It is feared that the death toll will rise, as many of the wounded are in critical condition.

Yesterday’s bombing came the day after Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi narrowly escaped an attempted assassination in Damascus by means of a roadside bomb. Opposition forces claimed five people were killed, including two of al-Halqi’s bodyguards.

Washington is escalating its proxy war in Syria in

defiance of massive public opposition in both the United States and the Middle East. A *New York Times* /CBS poll published yesterday found that 62 percent of the US public opposes intervention in Syria, with only 25 percent expressing support. Fully 77 percent oppose war with North Korea.

As for the Syrian people, even the pro-opposition US media has been forced to admit that it is largely hostile to the Islamist opposition. The *New York Times* noted that opposition “bombings have fueled a growing sense of insecurity that has prompted anger among Damascus residents who blame rebels for attacking civilians.”

As it fans the flames of sectarian warfare, Washington is setting the stage for a war that could ignite the entire Middle East and be far more destructive and costly than the already deeply unpopular wars launched by the Bush administration. The broader US objective is regime-change in Iran—Syria’s main regional ally—and the establishment of unchallenged US imperialist hegemony over the entire Middle East.

Already, violence is spilling over from Syria to neighboring Iraq and Lebanon, where the leader of the Shiite organization Hezbollah said that his organization might join the fighting in Syria.

Hassan Nasrallah said, “Syria has real friends in the region and in the world who will not allow Syria to fall in the hands of America, Israel, or the Takfiris [i.e., ultra-right Sunni Islamists]... What do you imagine would happen in the future if things deteriorate in a way that requires the intervention of the forces of resistance in this battle?”

Sectarian bloodshed has also spread into neighboring Iraq. On Monday, a wave of car bombings tore through Shiite areas in Baghdad, killing 36 people. Sunni forces tied to the Syrian opposition are fighting the Shiite-led Iraqi government, which is close to the Iranian regime, with hundreds of people killed in battles with security forces since clashes began throughout Iraq last week.



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