

Imperialism, Syria, and the threat of world war

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31 May 2013

The US-backed proxy war aimed at ousting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is entering a new and dangerous phase. The possibility of a major international war, with incalculable consequences for the world's population, is very real.

Yesterday, Lebanon's Al Manar television quoted Assad as saying that Syria had "received the first shipment of Russian anti-aircraft S-300 rockets. All our agreements with Russia will be implemented, and parts of them have already been implemented." These missiles, which Russia has pledged to deliver to defend Syria from possible US air strikes, have provoked an international crisis. Israeli officials have declared they will attack missile shipments.

If Israel acted on such a threat, Russian lives were lost, and Russia carried out retaliatory strikes on Israeli targets, the world would rapidly face a military confrontation between Russia and the United States—a situation that has not existed for more than a half century, since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Assad has also announced major victories in southern Syria after the intervention of the Lebanese Shia-based militia Hezbollah—together with Iranian forces, according to some reports—in support of the Syrian army. These forces have rapidly defeated the US-backed Sunni Islamist opposition, exposing the lack of popular support for the Al Qaeda-linked elements that make up the bulk of the opposition.

As terror bombings and fighting between US-backed Sunni forces and Iranian-backed Shia forces spread from Syria to Lebanon and Iraq, the Syrian war is emerging as the center of a broad sectarian war. The Obama administration and its allies are using the most reactionary forces to restructure the entire Middle East. The resulting conflict is becoming ever more bloody and dangerous, as the imperialist powers move to shore

up the faltering position of the opposition by escalating their own intervention.

In a *New York Times* comment, "In Syria, Go Big or Stay Home," Ray Takeyh of the US Council on Foreign Relations expressed the thinking of significant sections of the American ruling class: "The sort of intervention needed to bring about a decisive rebel victory would require more than no-fly zones and arms. It would mean disabling Mr. Assad's air power and putting boots on the ground ... Moreover, rather than intimidating Iran, a less-than-decisive American intervention would do the opposite: convince Iran's leaders that America doesn't have an appetite for fighting a major war in the region."

Takeyh's comment spells out the implications of the policy—shared by Washington and its major European allies—of constantly threatening Iran, Syria, and other Middle Eastern regimes that every option, including war, is "on the table." Desperate to control an oil-rich, geo-strategically critical region torn by decades of US wars and interventions, the imperialist powers are driven to ever more reckless threats and wars.

Sections of the ruling class in the United States and Europe are actively considering options to massively increase their troop levels. Another *New York Times* comment, "Americans and their Military, Drifting Apart," advocates restarting a draft lottery—a move aiming to conscript cannon fodder for the wars the United States is planning in the Middle East and beyond.

Russia and China, the major powers against whom Washington and Europe aim to seize and hold the Middle East, can themselves be targeted for war and regime change. The same methods—provocations based on stoking ethnic and sectarian conflicts in Chechnya in Russia, Tibet in China, and so on—could easily be

turned against the governments of these countries or any other power whose interests come into conflict with those of Washington and its allies.

It would be deeply complacent to downplay the immense dangers facing the international working class. The social interests that dictate policy in the centers of imperialism are, if anything, even more rapacious and reckless than their counterparts a hundred years ago who set off two world wars that killed tens of millions of people.

The fight against imperialism depends on the independent mobilization of the working class in opposition to all the forces of bourgeois politics. The political establishment in North America and Europe has proven completely impervious to the mass popular disaffection and opposition towards war that has only grown since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

A critical component of the pro-war political bloc are the pseudo-left organizations. The International Socialist Organization in the US, the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, and similar groups internationally have promoted the war in Syria as a “revolution.” These parties, speaking on behalf of privileged sections of the upper middle class, have worked quite consciously to block opposition to war, while functioning as mouthpieces of imperialist intelligence agencies.

They supported the 2011 NATO war in Libya, which served as a trial run for the US-led intervention in Syria. When the NATO powers intervened to support opposition Islamist militias fighting Colonel Muammar Gaddafi’s regime, the pseudo-left parties demanded that the imperialist powers arm the opposition.

They supported the destruction of the Gaddafi regime—through the seizure of Libya’s oil industry, the confiscation of its oil revenues, the carpet-bombing of major Libyan cities such as Tripoli and Sirte, and finally the murder of Gaddafi. They then promoted similar Islamist forces in Syria as the NATO powers turned their gun sights on Assad.

In its most recent statements, the ISO praises the escalating imperialist intervention in Syria as a “people’s revolution for freedom and dignity.”

The evolution of these forces underscores that the basic social force capable of opposing war is the working class—in the United States, Europe and around the world. Nearly five years after the crash of 2008, the

growing crisis of world capitalism is immensely exacerbating international tensions.

The ruling class, led by the US, is once again bringing the world to the brink of catastrophe. To prevent this requires the building of an international socialist movement against imperialism and war.



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