

# White House convenes meetings on Syria escalation

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The Obama White House is convening meetings this week to discuss measures to escalate the US-backed war for regime-change in Syria and prop up the flagging fortunes of the so-called “rebels” fighting to topple the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Obama has called upon his top advisors “to consider all possible options that would accomplish our objectives of helping the Syrian opposition serve the essential needs of the Syrian people and hastening a political transition to a post-Assad Syria,” National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan told the AFP news agency.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who was set to return to the Middle East for talks with the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority, called off the trip to remain in Washington for the discussions on Syria war plans. According to officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to the Associated Press, the proposals on the table include the direct arming of the US-backed militias fighting in Syria. Until now, Washington has maintained the pretense of providing only humanitarian assistance and “non-lethal” aid to these armed gangs.

In reality, the CIA and the Pentagon have played an indispensable role in organizing the purchase and shipment of arms into Syria, with the reactionary monarchies in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates putting up the money. One of the biggest recent shipments came from Croatia, with Washington arranging the transfer to the Syrian “rebels” of 3,000 tons of weapons left over from the Balkan wars of the 1990s, as well as from other European stockpiles, with Saudi Arabia footing the bill.

Britain and France are also considering acting more directly in arming the Syrian militias, having succeeded in overturning a European Union ban on such shipments at the beginning of this month. British Foreign Minister William Hague announced that the House of Commons

would vote on the issue before the shipment of British weapons.

Also on the agenda of the White House discussions is a proposal for the imposition of a no-fly zone, the device employed in Libya two years ago to initiate a full-scale US-NATO war for regime-change. The proposal has been aggressively advanced by Republican Senator John McCain and others in Congress, but has prompted warnings from top US military commanders that such a step in Syria would involve a major US military intervention.

The initiation of such a campaign in Syria, which has far more advanced air defenses than Libya possessed, would entail an intense bombing campaign with substantial civilian casualties. Also, while Washington had the fig leaf of a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing the Libyan no-fly zone, both Russia and China have made clear that they will block any such resolution in relation to Syria.

According to the US officials cited by the Associated Press, “Obama was leaning closer to signing off on sending weapons to vetted, moderate rebel units.” The use of American air power against Syrian government forces is “now being more seriously debated,” but, the officials stated, is “far less likely right now.”

What is driving the move toward stepped-up intervention is desperation in Washington that its proxy forces in Syria have suffered a series of military setbacks. These forces are dominated by Islamist militias, including the Al-Nusra front, which has formally affiliated to Al Qaeda.

The Syrian military, aided by fighters from Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shi’ite militia movement, succeeded last week in ousting anti-Assad militias from the town of Qusair, near the Lebanese border, depriving the “rebels” of a key conduit for arms and foreign fighters.

Now, Syrian government forces appear poised to launch

new offensives to drive the anti-regime militias out of both Homs, to the north of Qusair, and Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city and commercial center near the Turkish border in the north. Consolidation of government control over Homs would deprive the US-backed "rebels" of the ability to operate in the south of the country, while achieving a victory in Aleppo and its surrounding area would cut off their supply lines from Turkey.

The White House discussions on Syrian intervention are unfolding amid a major deployment of US forces within striking distance of Syria. War games dubbed "Eager Lion" began in Jordan this week, with 4,500 US soldiers, Marines and sailors participating alongside 3,000 Jordanian troops and another 500 from other countries, most of them members of the so-called "Friends of Syria."

Under the cover of these exercises, US Patriot Missiles, F-16 fighter planes and other advanced weaponry are being deployed on Jordanian territory, just across the border from Syria. While the war games end on June 20, US forces and armaments are to remain in place.

Jordan's military chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Awni el-Edwan, speaking at a joint news conference with Maj. Gen. Robert Catalanotti of the US Army's Central Command on Sunday, declared unconvincingly, "The exercises have nothing to do with any regional developments around Jordan." He deflected questions about the permanent US deployment in Jordan, declaring, "Patriot missiles and F-16 fighters are taking part in the drill in a pure military context. Keeping them in Jordan needs a political decision that we, military people, do not interfere in."

In the wake of the military reversals for the US-backed "rebels," both Washington and the forces it is backing in Syria have put on hold the plan for a so-called Geneva 2 conference, ostensibly backed by both Russia and the US, to negotiate a political settlement of the two-year-old armed conflict.

The Associated Press stated that "Assad's military successes appear to have rendered peace efforts largely meaningless in the short term." The *New York Times* and other sections of the media have made similar statements, exposing the fact that the sole purpose of the talks for Washington was to force through regime-change. Now, Washington reasons, is not the time for "peace," but rather for an escalation of the war in order to change the facts on the ground.

Behind the human rights pretensions and crocodile tears for the "Syrian people," the Obama administration is

pursuing far-reaching strategic and commercial interests in its bid to overthrow the Assad regime, and is prepared to kill tens if not hundreds of thousands more Syrians to achieve them.

While both Washington and the Western media have blamed the "rebel" reversals on the role played by a few thousand Hezbollah fighters or aid to Assad from Russia and Iran, the reality is that, however much Syrians may dislike the current regime, they are hostile to and fear the so-called rebels even more.

These forces are increasingly dominated by Islamists, many of them foreign fighters funneled into the country. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an anti-Assad outfit based in London, reported recently that 2,219 foreign fighters have been killed in the war, suggesting that the numbers fighting in Syria must be in the tens of thousands.

The Observatory also reported over the weekend an incident in Aleppo that underscores why there is such popular hatred for the forces extolled by much of the pseudo-left in the West as "Syrian revolutionaries." According to the report, Islamist "rebels" overheard Mohammed Qatta, a 14-year-old who sold coffee in the street, turn away a customer using a popular Syrian phrase, "Even if [Prophet] Mohammed comes back to life, I won't."

The Islamists accused the boy of blasphemy, took him away and whipped him. They brought him before an assembled crowd, including his parents, and announced his "crime" and his sentence of death. They then shot him through the mouth and the neck as his mother begged them to kill her instead.

In a video interview posted by the Aleppo Media Center, an opposition group, the boy's mother cried, "Why did they kill my son? We are not for or against anybody in this conflict. May God take revenge on them."



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