The war for regime-change in Syria

Barry Grey
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It will become increasingly clear that the central aim of the new war launched by the Obama administration is the overthrow of the pro-Iranian, pro-Russian regime in Syria and installation of a US puppet government. The campaign against ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is camouflage for a decision to implement the war against Damascus that was called off last September and, at the same time, consolidate American control of Iraq.

ISIS, a creation of US imperialist intervention in Iraq, Libya and Syria, has provided a new pretext for US aggression in the Middle East. The coalition of states being organized by Washington is directed against the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad and its ally Iran—a fact underscored by the declaration on Friday by Secretary of State John Kerry that the US would seek to exclude both Iran and Syria from diplomatic talks scheduled in Paris on Monday.

That Saudi Arabia is playing the central role in this coalition points to the real war aims lurking behind the façade of an anti-ISIS crusade. The Saudis have been among the biggest backers of ISIS, supplying arms and cash in league with other Gulf sheikdoms and the CIA. Riyadh bitterly denounced the Obama administration for calling off the war against Syria last year. It sees the removal of Assad as the essential first step in overthrowing the Shiite regime in Iran.

The concerns being expressed in official circles about the difficulty of making the "moderate" opposition in Syria the basis of a proxy army against ISIS reflect the fact that there is virtually no such opposition on the ground in Syria.

The *New York Times* on Friday published an article acknowledging that the "rebel" forces labeled "moderate" by Washington in many cases share ISIS' extreme Islamist outlook, and even the more or less secularist militias fight side by side with the Al Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda branch in Syria which is listed by the US State Department as a terrorist organization.

The *Times* quotes Aron Lund of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace as saying: "You are not going to find this neat, clean, secular rebel group that respects human rights and that is waiting and ready because they don't exist. It is a very dirty war and you have to deal with what is on offer…"

Ryan C. Crocker, a former US ambassador to Iraq and Syria, is quoted as saying, "We need to do everything we can to figure out who the non-ISIS opposition is. Frankly, we don't have a clue."

They don't have a clue because the anti-Assad insurgency financed and armed by Washington and its allies is a reactionary imperialist-backed movement dominated by Al Qaeda-linked forces, the most powerful of which is ISIS.

The newly announced war is the product of intensive planning behind the backs of the American people ever since the humiliating decision to call off the war last September. Britain had pulled out of the impending war and the US was unable to forge a reliable base of international support. Washington was internally divided, in part because of Russian opposition to the war and the potential for a wider conflict. At the same time, military action had almost no public support.

Last September 19, the *World Socialist Web Site* published a lecture by WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North that included the following:

> It seems that the immediate threat of another major US military intervention has receded. But the postponement of war does not lessen the likelihood, indeed, the inevitability, of the outbreak of a major war. As the bellicose statements emanating from Washington make clear, the 'military option' remains on the

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> table. Nor is Syria the only target for military attack. US operations against Syria would set the stage for a clash with Iran. And, still further, the logic of US imperialism's drive for global dominance leads to a confrontation with Russia and China. Nor can it be excluded that the conflict of interests among the major imperialist powers—for example, the United States and Germany—might under certain conditions metastasize into armed conflict.

This analysis has been completely vindicated. ISIS conveniently provided the conditions for Washington to renew its war drive against Syria, including giving the US the propaganda means for, at least temporarily, weakening anti-war sentiment by carrying out the savage beheading of two American journalists.

That Washington has been preparing the new war for a considerable period of time was acknowledged in a commentary published on the eve of Obama's Wednesday night speech by Anthony H. Cordesman of the highly influential Washington think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Cordesman wrote: "The president is now trapped to some extent by his previous misstatement about the United States not having a strategy. Anyone who looks at the timeline of US action will see he is now formally announcing a strategy that the United States not only had already developed in July, but partly begun to implement after the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) first made major gains back in December 2013."

December 2013, it should be pointed out, marked the beginning of the US- and German-backed demonstrations in Kiev, led by armed neo-fascist forces from Svoboda and the Right Sector, which led two months later to the overthrow of the pro-Russian government and installation of a rabidly anti-Russian regime. Washington has continually pushed the resulting confrontation to the point of military conflict in order to isolate and weaken Moscow.

This crisis- and war-mongering drive against Russia was no doubt bound up with the plans for war against Syria, Russia's only ally in the Arab world and the site of a major Russian naval base.

The new war represents a massive escalation of US imperialist aggression in the entire Middle East and beyond. Writing the day after Obama's speech, Cordesman outlined the American ruling class' perspective of perpetual war, culminating in military conflicts with nuclear-armed Russia and China.

"A serious threat of violent jihadism and extremism is likely to endure for years to come, and reemerge with similar threats in an arc that reaches from Morocco to the Philippines and from Sub-Saharan Africa to Russia and China," Cordesman wrote. "This may not be a 'long war' in any one place, but outbreaks of violent instability seem likely to be the rule not the exception."

This turn to endless war can be understood only if it is placed within a broader historical context. The dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy coincided with the first Gulf War of 1990-1991. That war marked the beginning of a new eruption of imperialism internationally.

The ensuing decades have seen one US imperialist war or military attack after another. A partial list of countries targeted includes Iraq (three times), Somalia, Haiti, Sudan, Serbia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen. With the removal of the Soviet Union as a restraining factor, imperialism has openly revealed its essence—in Lenin's words, reaction all down the line—seeking to impose a new form of colonialism.

The same basic agenda drives the American ruling class today that drove it in the first Gulf War 23 years ago: control of the vast energy resources of the Middle East and the transformation of the region into a military and political staging ground for conquest and plunder all over the world.

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