

Threat of wider war looms as Saudi monarchy proposes Syria intervention

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6 February 2016

The Saudi Arabian monarchy Thursday declared that it is prepared to send ground troops into Syria under the pretext of prosecuting the US-declared war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The proposal from Riyadh follows the breakdown of Geneva III, the UN-mediated peace talks between the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad and a Saudi-sponsored “rebel” negotiating committee consisting of Islamist militia leaders and exile politicians aligned with Western intelligence agencies.

The talks were suspended Wednesday after the opposition refused to negotiate under conditions in which Syrian government forces, backed by Russian air strikes, have registered major gains on the battlefield, threatening to reverse the territorial gains won by the Western-backed militias in recent years.

Syrian government forces, supported by pro-government militias, including elements of the Lebanese Hezbollah, have succeeded in breaking a siege of two predominantly Shia villages, Nubl and Zahra, which for nearly four years had held out against the threat of a sectarian massacre at the hands of Al Qaeda-linked forces backed by Washington and its regional allies.

The advance has succeeded in reversing the tide of battle around Aleppo, Syria’s largest city, breaking the siege of the government-held western part of the city at the hands of the opposition, while imposing a siege on the eastern part, which has been under its control. The victories in the northern countryside have effectively cut off the supply line that has brought arms and ammunition to the Western-backed militias from Turkey.

Syrian government forces have also registered significant advances in Latakia Province in the northwest as well as in Daraa in the south.

These developments have led to calls by Washington and its allies for an immediate halt to the Russian bombing campaign initiated at the end of last September, which US and allied officials have blamed for the breakdown of the talks in Geneva.

“We have seen that the intense Russian air strikes mainly targeting opposition groups in Syria are undermining the efforts to find a political solution to the conflict,” Jens Stoltenberg, secretary general of the US-led NATO military alliance said Friday. Like his counterparts in Washington, Stoltenberg fails to name the “opposition groups” about which he is concerned, because the leading one is the Al Nusra Front, Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate.

The fear of the “rebels” and their Western patrons is that the Russian-backed advances of Syrian government forces will make it impossible to achieve by means of negotiations what they are unable to procure on the battlefield: the toppling of Assad and the imposition of a more pliant US puppet regime.

The stepped-up military operations in and around Aleppo have sent a stream of refugees heading toward the Turkish border, less than 40 miles to the north. The Turkish government, however, has closed the border crossings. At the Oncupinar border crossing near the Turkish city of Kilis, one Syrian woman was reportedly shot and killed by Turkish security forces.

Ankara’s evident aim is to create a humanitarian crisis on the border, providing a pretext for military intervention.

Moscow has charged that Turkey is engaged in active preparations for an invasion of Syria. “We have serious grounds to suspect Turkey is in intensive preparations for an armed invasion of the territory of a sovereign state—the Syrian Arab Republic,” the Russian defense ministry said in a statement. Thursday.

The defense ministry reported that Turkey had denied permission for a Russian reconnaissance plane to fly over the Turkish-Syrian border, but that it had already detected “more and more signs of covert preparations by the Turkish armed forces for active action on Syrian territory.” These included the deployment of troops and military equipment and the paving of parking lots on both sides of the border for heavy trucks and equipment.

The Saudi offer to send ground troops into Syria has undoubtedly been made in conjunction with the Turkish buildup. The Saudi monarchy and Turkey’s government recently set up a military coordination body.

“The kingdom is ready to participate in any ground operations that the coalition [against ISIS] may agree to carry out in Syria,” Saudi military spokesman brigadier general Ahmed al-Asiri said on Thursday, touting the Saudi army’s “experience in Yemen,” which has consisted largely of the slaughter of Yemeni civilians in airstrikes.

For its part, the Turkish government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is determined to prevent the consolidation of an autonomous Syrian Kurdish zone on its border.

The inseparable connection between military aggression abroad and police state repression at home found expression in Turkey Friday with the presentation of a criminal indictment against two journalists, Can Dunder and Erdem Gul, on charges of “espionage,” “attempting to topple the government” and support for terrorism. The two are being prosecuted for the publication by their newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, of an article exposing the use of trucks of the National Intelligence Agency to ship arms across the border to ISIS. Turkish police officers who intercepted some of the trucks have been similarly charged. The defendants could face life sentences.

“That kind of news is very welcome,” US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said in response to the Saudi offer, adding that he intended to discuss it with his Saudi counterpart in Brussels next week.

An intervention by Turkey and Saudi Arabia, two of the principal patrons of the Islamist militias in Syria, would signal a major escalation of the crisis and a desperate bid by US imperialism itself to salvage the nearly five-year-old war for regime change in Syria.

It would dramatically increase the dangers of the Syrian conflict spiraling out of control into a full-scale regional war, pitting Saudi Arabia and Turkey against Iran. Any such intervention would be carried out in collaboration with Washington, which is Turkey’s NATO ally, posing the threat of a direct confrontation between the US and Russia, the world’s two major nuclear powers.



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