

# **SYRIA PEACE PLAN: West Moves To Kill Off “Important First Step” To End Violence**

Clinton Pushes So-called Opposition’s Demand For ‘Regime Change Or Nothing’

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No sooner had Kofi Annan, the special United Nations envoy to Syria, announced scoring “an important first step” towards implementing a peace plan in the war-torn country, the US and Western powers were scrambling to scupper the goalposts.

US secretary of state Hillary Clinton led Western efforts to undermine the peace bid by appearing to abandon recently agreed terms for a ceasefire that would have included all parties in Syria.

In responding to the peace plan development, Clinton shifted the burden of responsibility for violence on to the Syrian government and backed the demands of fractious “opposition groups” for Syria’s President Bashar Al Assad to step down.

After more than a week of shuttle diplomacy that first began with Kofi Annan winning the unanimous support for his plan at the United Nations Security Council, the former UN secretary general revealed on Tuesday that the government of Syria’s President Assad had accepted his six-point proposal to bring an end to the violence that has racked Syria for the past year.

The primary point of the peace plan is for all armed groups, including the Syrian state forces, to call a ceasefire to enable a process of dialogue.

A previous resolution proposed last month at the UN Security Council by the Arab League and backed by the US, Britain and France was vetoed by Russia and China. Moscow and Beijing saw that move as “one-sided” as it only called on the Syrian government forces to lay down their weapons. There was no reciprocal demand on armed opposition factions, who have been covertly supported by Arab and Western powers, to end their violence. Furthermore, that earlier resolution called on President Assad to quit power – a provocative and baseless demand.

By contrast, the latest peace plan outlined by Kofi Annan does not make any implied pejorative ultimatums on the Assad government. It simply calls for all parties to the conflict to implement a ceasefire as a precondition for dialogue on future political reforms.

In backing the Annan package put forward on 21 March in New York, Britain’s UN ambassador Mark Lyall Grant, said the Security Council’s statement sends “precisely the strong and united message to the Syrian government and all other actors in Syria that they

need to respond, and respond quickly and immediately, to the six-point plan”.

That endorsement of the Annan peace plan marked a shift by Britain, the US and France more towards the position of Russia, China and indeed tacitly towards that of the Syrian government in that it was accepting the reality that violence in Syria was emanating from “actors” other than just those of the state.

For that past year, the Syrian government has rejected allegations by the Western governments – allegations constantly amplified by biased reportage in the mainstream media – that it is unilaterally cracking down on a civilian Arab Spring-style pro-democracy movement. (Echoes of Libya here.)

By contrast, the Syrian authorities have claimed that the violence has been instigated and fuelled by foreign powers that are trying to engineer “regime change”. That claim is evidenced in recent declarations by Gulf Arab countries, primarily Saudi Arabia and Qatar, that they are sending weapons to so-called “Syrian opposition groups” – a damning admission of unprecedented interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.

In the past week too, the US has announced that it is sending “non-lethal aid” to anti-government forces in Syria – supplies that will augment undeclared, but known, munitions from the US already in Syria. There have also been credible reports of special forces from Britain and France operating clandestinely in Syria along with mercenaries from Libya, Iraq and Lebanon. Major sources of weapons and logistical support flowing into Syria are NATO allies Israel and Turkey.

These jig-saw pieces add up to one consistent picture: that violence in Syria is, as the Syrian government maintains, being fomented, fuelled and directed by Western powers and their regional allies with the view to overthrowing Damascus. The 40-year-old rule by the Assad family in Syria may not be a model of liberal democracy. But it has a reputable position with regard to standing up to decades of US, NATO, Israeli aggression in the Middle East. And its secular style of government tolerant to all religions and non-religions is streets ahead of the absolute Wahhabist monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf dictatorships that the West comfortably sponsor.

In other words, the Assad government is no vassal bending over backwards to accommodate Washington, London and Paris, as with so many other Arab tyrannical regimes. Syria’s close alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran is a further reason why the Western powers desperately want regime change in Damascus, and they are pushing that objective under the cynical cover of concern for democratic freedom and human rights.

There may be genuine grounds for political reform in Syria and a degree of popular discontent with the Assad government. But such demand for change is not represented by so-called opposition groups under the umbrella of the Western and Gulf Arab-backed Syrian National Council and Syrian Free Army. These “opposition” factions have acted from the outset with an armed subversive agenda that dovetails with their foreign sponsors’ wider agenda of precipitating regime change. Deadly car bombs and other terrorist atrocities killing hundreds of civilians are not the actions of groups interested in national dialogue and popular reform.

Notably, the so-called oppositionists gathering this week in Turkey for a “friends of Syria conference” supported by Western powers and Gulf Arab monarchies, rejected the Annan

peace plan out of hand. They reiterated their demand for President Assad to step down.

Moving away from the UN Security Council endorsement of the Annan plan, Hillary Clinton poured scorn on the news that the Assad government had accepted it.

Speaking in Washington, she said: "Given Assad's history of over-promising and under-delivering, that commitment must now be matched by immediate actions. We will judge Assad's sincerity and seriousness by what he does, not by what he says." Clinton called on Assad to order his forces to cease fire and start withdrawing from populated areas.

Pointedly, there was no demand from Clinton for other parties to end the violence or a rebuke for their out-of-hand rejection of the Annan peace plan. Instead, Clinton said that the US "would be pushing them [the Western-backed opposition] very hard to put forward a unified vision [of regime change]".

In other words, the US government is signaling that despite the recent backing of the Kofi Annan peace plan at the UN Security Council, Washington will make sure that there will no ceasefire to facilitate political dialogue in Syria. Rather, it is "regime change or nothing".

The question is: why did the US and other Western powers endorse Annan's peace proposal last week? Possibly, they believed their own propaganda about the "brutal Assad regime" and did not expect Damascus to accept the plan. Alternatively, it was just a ruse to get Russia and China onboard a consensus towards Syrian that can now be a twisted as the Assad government "acting in bad faith" because it won't implement a ceasefire (with impossible terms); thus paving the way for further Western interference to "protect civilians".

Such cynical subterfuge has resonances with the earlier Arab League peace mission to Syria at the beginning of this year. That mission appeared to be initially backed by Western powers and their Gulf Arab proxies. However, when the League's monitors reported that violence deployed by the Syrian state forces was much less than was being alleged by Western governments and mainstream media, and that there was credence to Syrian government claims of it fighting armed subversive groups, the Western powers immediately scuppered the observer mission, deleting it from the records.

In a nutshell, the Western policy towards Syria is: play by our rules, otherwise we vandalise the goalposts and walk off the field with the ball. A no-win situation for any reasonable opponent.

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website Globalresearch.ca. He is a Master’s graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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