

SYRIA: US and allies ramp up plans for military intervention in Syria

By [Chris Marsden](#)

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Accusations that the Syrian government is either wholly or mainly responsible for breaches of the United Nations' ceasefire are meant to provide a pretext for military intervention by the imperialist powers and their proxies.

The US and European media, meanwhile, is acting as a barely concealed propaganda instrument tasked with preparing public opinion for the latest criminal adventure in the Middle East—a war for regime change in Syria to follow those waged in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Saturation coverage was given to an explosion in Hama, with “opposition” sources cited to claim that a Scud missile attack had destroyed a building, accompanied by the usual inflated casualty figures. The more believable explanation that the explosion was due to an accident at a building used as a bomb factory was relegated to an aside.

The same holds true of the widespread reporting of “shock footage” of a journalist supposedly being “buried alive” by Syrian troops—a video so obviously staged and badly scripted that even supporters of the opposition have deemed it as a fake.

In contrast, a campaign by the opposition to create the conditions for a military intervention through systematic violations of the cease-fire has been downplayed or portrayed as staged provocations by the regime of Bashir al-Assad.

On Friday, a suicide bomber in Damascus killed 10 people and wounded more than 28 others outside the Zain al-Abideen mosque. Witnesses said a man in military uniform detonated an explosives vest while he was among soldiers that left body parts scattered across the tarmac.

Earlier, a loud blast was heard near a bus station used by pro-Assad militiamen preventing demonstrations in the capital—one of four more minor explosions in Damascus in which four people were wounded.

On Saturday, oppositionists clashed with troops in the coastal town of Burj Islam, close to the presidential summer palace. The intense shooting lasted for 15 to 30 minutes.

On Saturday, oppositionists in dinghies attacked a military unit on the Mediterranean coast, about 30 kilometres from the border with Turkey, leading to the deaths of several members of the Syrian armed forces.

That same day, Lebanon said its navy seized three containers with large quantities of

weapons destined for the opposition groups. The Lutfallah II began its voyage from Libya, stopped off in Alexandria in Egypt, and then headed for Tripoli in Lebanon before it was intercepted.

The official statements of the UN, Washington, Paris and Ankara are made as if none of this is taking place.

On Friday, even as reports of the suicide bombing in Damascus were emerging, UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon warned that Syria's government was "in contravention" of the April 12 cease-fire and that Assad's crackdown has reached an "intolerable stage."

Ban said the UN would soon beef up its 15 observers in Syria to 300.

Ban's statement provided the US with another opportunity to declare that Damascus has failed to honour the UN peace plan. On April 28, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said that the UN peace plan "as a whole is failing.... It remains our assessment that the bulk of the violations of the cease-fire pledge are coming from the regime side."

The US has in fact said the same thing from day one, threatening on April 21 that it may not even allow the renewal of the UN monitoring mission in Syria after the first three months is up. "Our patience is exhausted," Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the UN told the Security Council.

The US has already signalled its intention to move to a military solution. Defence Undersecretary Kathleen Hicks and National Security Council director of strategies Derek Chollet have told the Senate that the UN diplomatic initiative had now reached "the point of collapse".

The Pentagon has its "plan B" in place, including calling on US troops to set up a security zone along the border between Syria and Turkey. "We are planning various strategies for a vast range of scenarios, including the possibility of helping allies and partners on the frontier zones," Hicks said April 27.

On April 19, Defence Secretary Leon Panetta disclosed that the Pentagon has plans in place for establishing humanitarian corridors in Syria. "Anything that takes out the Assad regime is a step in the right direction," he said.

The same line is coming from Paris. French president Nicholas Sarkozy was the first Western leader to publicly back humanitarian corridors.

Last week, Foreign Minister Alan Juppé said that it may be necessary for the UN Security Council to consider a resolution authorising the use of force. "We cannot allow the [Damascus] regime to defy us," he said. If the peace plan fails, "we would have to move to a new stage with a Chapter Seven resolution to stop this tragedy".

May 5, when former UN secretary general Kofi Annan is set to present his report on the peace process, will be "a moment of truth", Juppé said. France has been discussing invoking Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which allows for military action, with other powers, he added.

Secretary of State Hilary Clinton threatened to invoke Chapter 7 at the April 18 "Friends of Syria" meeting in Paris.

On Thursday, Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu told parliament, "In the face of developments in Syria, we are taking into consideration any kind of possibility in line with our national security and interests." This includes setting up a buffer zone on the Syrian side of the border that Turkey wants to be policed by NATO.

On April 9, four Syrian refugees and a Turkish policeman and a translator were wounded in the Kilis refugee camp on the 560-mile Turkish-Syrian border. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan responded by threatening to invoke Article 5 of the NATO treaty, stipulating that an attack against a NATO member is considered an attack against all members.

The Arab states are also ready to line up behind a military attack on Damascus. The head of the Arab League, Nabil el-Arabi, said Arab foreign ministers have asked him to convene a meeting of all the Syrian opposition factions on May 16. On Friday, Saudi king Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud met with Qatar's crown prince Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Riyadh to plan a joint intervention at the meeting.

Regime change in Syria ultimately targets its main regional ally, Iran, as well as the oil and military interests of Russia and China in the region. Tensions are worsening daily as a result.

Iran's deputy foreign minister, Hossein Amirabdollahian, has denounced "The parties who back sending weapons to Syria" as "responsible for killing innocent people."

Russian foreign ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said, "Opposition groups have essentially reverted to waging wide-scale terror in the region."

On Saturday, during a visit to Moscow, Chinese vice foreign minister Cheng Guoping said that both sides "hold 100 percent coinciding positions on the issues of North Korea and Syria."

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