

US, Britain Push for Military Intervention in Syria

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The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, has told the Senate that the Obama administration is actively considering the use of military force in Syria.

Dempsey said Thursday that he had provided President Barack Obama with options for military strikes in Syria. Responding to hostile questioning from Republican Senator John McCain, a leading advocate of US military intervention, he said the use of “kinetic” strikes—i.e., missiles and bombs—“is under deliberation inside of our agencies of government.”

He said that if not, then President Bashar al-Assad would still hold power in a year because “[C]urrently the tide seems to have shifted in his favour.” Given how much Washington has invested in Assad’s removal, this is a powerful indication that the US is moving to a military solution sooner rather than later.

Senator Carl Levin even asked Dempsey to provide the Senate panel with an unclassified list of options by next week. That same day, it was announced that the military commander of the opposition Free Syrian Army, General Salim Idriss, would visit the US next week for meetings at the UN and possibly the White House.

Also speaking to the Senate, Samantha Power, Obama’s nominee for ambassador to the UN, described “the failure of the UN Security Council to respond to the slaughter in Syria” as “a disgrace that history will judge harshly.”

She cautioned against placing too much emphasis on breaking Russia and China from their alliance with Assad, indicating that Washington is contemplating action without UN authorisation.

Dempsey spoke after the outgoing head of the British armed forces, General Sir David Richards, spoke to *The Daily Telegraph* and Rupert Murdoch’s *The Sun*, indicating that a joint military intervention with the US was under active discussion. Richards said “there is a great reluctance to see Western boots on the ground in a place like Syria,” and that a no-fly zone “is insufficient... You have to be able, as we did successfully in Libya, to hit ground targets.”

He told *The Sun* that the UK “would have to act” if the Assad regime collapsed, to stop the proliferation of chemical weapons to Islamist insurgents. “The risk of terrorism is becoming more and more dominant in our strategic vision for what we might do in Syria,” he said. “If that risk develops, we would almost certainly have to act to mitigate it and we are ready to do so... Some could characterise that, even though it might be for a limited period, as a war.”

Advocates of war from across the political establishment, from Power to McCain, invoke the humanitarian disaster in Syria as providing a supposed moral imperative.

This week the media was filled with chilling depictions of the situation in Syria, emanating from the UN or from pro-opposition groups. The UN's refugee chief Antonio Guterres told the Security Council that the Syrian conflict has caused the worst refugee crisis for 20 years, with 6,000 people fleeing the country every day. In addition, 5,000 people are being killed each month, bringing total casualties to over 93,000 and refugees to over five million.

Leila Zerrougui, the UN's special representative for children and armed conflict, visiting refugee camps, spoke of "serious human rights abuses, war crimes and crimes against humanity" in Syria as "the rule." The conflict was producing "a generation of children who lost their childhood, have a lot of hate and are illiterate."

The media dutifully reported the visit by US Secretary of State John Kerry to a refugee camp in Jordan. A carefully choreographed appeal was made by six "refugees"—supporters of the opposition—for the US to immediately set up a no-fly zone and buffer zones.

"Where is the international community? What are you waiting for?" asked an unnamed woman.

This is contemptible propaganda. The devastation of Syria, the refugee crisis, the growing list of casualties, and its descent into sectarian warfare, are wholly the responsibility of the imperialist powers.

In the aftermath of the downfall of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, the US moved to dictate events—first in Libya and now Syria—by force of arms and through various compliant proxy forces.

The Baathist regime of al-Assad is reactionary to the core, but the opposition movement that developed against him is wholly the creature of the US. It is made up of an alliance of CIA assets, ex-regime figures and Islamists entrusted with the creation of a pro-western regime to ensure that the oil riches of the Middle East continue to flood into the coffers of US-based transnationals and banks.

In the process, brutal sectarian crimes have been committed, threatening to plunge the entire region into a bloody, communal struggle. This week alone, the BBC reported on how Syria's Christian minority is being targeted by jihadis. Also, mortar shells struck near a major Shiite shrine of Sayida Zeinab, the Prophet Muhammad's granddaughter, outside Damascus; it has become a rallying point for Hezbollah fighters supporting Assad, now that the Syrian conflict has already spread to Lebanon.

The argument presently unfolding in ruling circles in the US and Europe is over whether Syria should be bled dry through an ongoing campaign of destabilisation funded by the Gulf States and Turkey, or whether to model Syria policy more directly on the war in Libya—which ended in the deposing and murder of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

This campaign is provided with political cover by pseudo-left tendencies such as the International Socialist Organisation in the US, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and the New Anticapitalist Party in France, who line up to hail the supposed "revolutionary forces" represented by the Syrian opposition.

Speaking in London last weekend, the political representative of the SWP in Syria, Ghayath Naisse, supported the arming of the opposition by Washington declaring, "We want to arm the people," but "with no conditions."

Simon Assaf of the SWP was more cynical still, stating, "We support the uprising of the people, to give them arms," adding that "There is no such thing as a weapons fairy."

The overthrow of Assad by the imperialist powers and their flunkies would be a bloody step in the consolidation of US hegemony in the Middle East and towards war against Iran. It would escalate conflict with Russia and China, bringing with it the danger of a far bloodier global war.

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