

US, Arab League push for UN action against Syria

By Jean Shaoul
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The United States is working with Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other members of the Arab League to push through a resolution for the United Nations Security Council to lay the basis for military intervention along the line of last year's NATO war against Libya.

The resolution is a gun held at the head of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al Assad. It endorses the Arab League call for him to step down and hand over power to his deputy, start a dialogue with the oppositionists, and form a government of national unity followed by multiparty elections within six months.

The resolution has the full support of France and Britain, the two European nations on whom the US relied to depose Muammar Gaddafi. It is being moved in close collaboration with the regime of Nicolas Sarkozy, while Mark Lyall Grant, Britain's ambassador to the UN, said he hoped to table the resolution as early as Wednesday.

The Assad regime condemned the resolution. Its UN ambassador Bashar Jaafari stated: "They deal with us as if we are a former colony that should subjugate itself to their will... Syria will not be Libya; Syria will not be Iraq; Syria will not be Somalia; Syria will not be a failed state."

The demand came amid escalating fighting within Syria itself, as army forces there battled Western-backed armed "rebels" who have taken over parts of the eastern suburbs of Damascus, the Syrian capital. Roughly 2,000 Syrian troops supported by tanks are trying to regain control of the suburbs of Saqba, Kfar Batna, and Hammouriya.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the anti-Assad fighters "have been using guerrilla tactics, blowing up oil and gas pipelines, striking at troops from buildings and attacking transport vehicles, deploying the kind of roadside bombs that became a signature part of the war

against US forces in neighbouring Iraq."

Syrian state news agency SANA reported the military funerals of 28 soldiers and police on Saturday and another 23 on Sunday. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 31 soldiers and 41 civilians and "rebel" fighters were killed Sunday.

The Arab League's demand for Assad to step down, along the lines of the Saudi-dominated Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) brokered deal for Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh, comes after a meeting in Cairo last Sunday called to evaluate its mission to Syria. Unlike Saleh, however, Assad cannot expect to receive a visa to the US to ostensibly seek medical treatment. Washington intends for his fate to be more akin to those of Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein, who were both murdered after a US takeover of their countries.

The stated purpose of the Arab League observer mission was to monitor the plan agreed with Assad last December and to oversee the cessation of violence on both sides. Despite the explicit ban in the Arab League's charter on interference in a member country's system of government, the observer mission was designed to fail, so as to provide the pretext for demanding that Assad step down.

While the League's leader, Sudan's General Mohammed al-Dabi, said that the situation had improved and called for the mission to be strengthened, the Saudis, Qataris and other Gulf States dubbed the mission a failure and withdrew their funding and observers. The mission has now been suspended.

The League is merely implementing a plan hatched in Washington. President Barack Obama has repeatedly declared the Syrian government's actions "unacceptable" and called for Assad to relinquish power.

The demand was made a central feature of his State of the Union address last week, in which he boasted, “Ending the Iraq war has allowed us to strike decisive blows against our enemies.”

“A year ago, Qaddafi was one of the world’s longest-serving dictators—a murderer with American blood on his hands. Today, he is gone,” he continued. “And in Syria, I have no doubt that the Assad regime will soon discover that the forces of change cannot be reversed.”

Syria is only a steppingstone to Washington’s major target, Iran, which is seen as an obstacle to unchallenged US hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East and Caspian Basin. This campaign also helps isolate Russia and China—the ultimate targets of America’s push for geopolitical dominance.

“Let there be no doubt,” Obama threatened, “America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal.”

Though the Arab League comprises some of the world’s most despotic and unpopular regimes, Washington hopes to use it to provide a cover to legitimise regime change in Syria. Washington knows that another unilateral US military intervention in the region would provoke fury in the Arab masses, threatening the deeply unpopular and fragile regimes on which it relies.

As well as initiating the Syrian proposals via the GCC and the Arab League, Riyadh and Doha are backing the Islamist-dominated Syrian opposition militarily and politically, as they did earlier in Libya.

On Friday, Ahmad Ramadan, a member of the Syrian National Council (SNC), told Kuwait’s *Al-Rai* newspaper that Saudi Arabia plans to recognise the SNC as the “official representative” of the Syrian people—a key step in legitimising military intervention against Syria.

Britain’s *The Times* carried a report from a Syrian dissident that Saudi Arabia and Qatar had agreed to fund the SNC, as well as pro-SNC armed groups such as the Free Syrian Army fighting the Assad regime.

Qatar’s Prime Minister Hamad Bin Jasim Bin Jaber al Thani told *Al-Jazeera*, “We are going to present all Arab resolutions, including the one from two days ago, to the Security Council so the highest authority in the world can adopt them.”

The US State Department confirmed that it would support the resolution. It has despatched Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman to Russia in an effort to win support for the new resolution, with its implicit call for an arms embargo, sanctions and a military intervention.

Even though the US has let the Arab League and the European powers publicly lead the anti-Syrian campaign, it is impossible to disguise the fact that the proposed UN resolution has “made in the USA” stamped all over it. Russia has refused to agree, calling the resolution “unacceptable”. Gennady Gatilov, Russia’s deputy foreign minister, said that the draft contains “no fundamental consideration for our position” and is missing “key aspects that are fundamental to us.”

Russia has said that it will not allow the West to carry out another Libyan-style military intervention. It abstained in the UN vote on the NATO operation, later accusing the West of overstepping its mandate to protect civilians.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin declared that the US “wants to control everything” and make other countries its “vassals,” not allies. The Libyan resolution was like the “medieval calls for crusades”, he said.

Putin has accused NATO forces and US drones of being behind Gaddafi’s brutal execution.

Russia has extensive defence and oil contracts with Syria, worth about \$700 million a year, and has its only Mediterranean base at the Syrian port of Tartus.

US allies Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Gulf state monarchies—all dominated by Sunni elites—have lined up with Washington against Shiite-ruled Iran. They are using inflammatory sectarian language to try to galvanise support for a policy of civil war that threatens not only Syria’s Shiite and Christian minorities, who make up 25 percent of the population, but which could trigger a regional war.

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