

Fighting breaks out in Syrian capital as Turkey, NATO threaten war

By Joseph Kishore
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Syrian President Bashar al-Assad declared Tuesday that the country was in a state of war as intense fighting erupted in the capital Damascus between the government and opposition forces that are backed by the US. There were also reports of British special operations forces entering the country from neighboring Turkey.

The fighting came the same day as a belligerent speech by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan before the Turkish parliament, threatening a military response to any Syrian troop movements near the border of the two countries. This followed a meeting of NATO members, including Turkey and the US, to discuss a coordinated response to the downing of a Turkish jet by Syria late last week.

“We will not fall into the trap of warmongers,” Erdogan said, “but we will not stay silent in the face of an attack made against our plane in international airspace.” Turkey’s “wrath is fierce and intense when it needs to be,” he added.

Erdogan also said that Turkey would provide “all possible support to liberate the Syrians from dictatorship,” i.e., to assist opposition forces in overthrowing the Assad government.

The United States, in particular, is leading a campaign to seize on the downing of the plane—the details of which are still unclear—to escalate attacks on the Assad government that could pave the way for direct military intervention.

Syrian opposition forces, which have a base of operations in Turkey and are being coordinated and armed by the US and its allies, were clearly emboldened by these developments. The coordinated attack on Syrian troops in Damascus was the most significant violence in the capital since the conflict began more than a year ago. Attacks targeted the

presidential palace and the Republican Guard.

The right-wing Israeli intelligence web site *DebkaFile* reported that British special operations forces had crossed into Syria on Tuesday. “Our military sources estimate that the British military drive into Syria, if confirmed, is designed to establish the first safe zone along the Syrian-Turkish border, to be followed by more Western military incursions,” it reported.

The actions of Turkey and NATO are aimed at bolstering the opposition forces and ensuring that they have greater freedom of movement along the 500-mile-long Syria-Turkey border.

In his speech before parliament, Erdogan said that Turkey was modifying its military rules of engagement. “Every military element approaching Turkey from the Syrian border and representing a security risk and danger will be assessed as a military threat and will be treated as a military target,” he said. At the same time, he ordered Turkish military units to deploy along the border.

This effectively prevents Syria from taking any military action against Free Syrian Army forces near the border, or if it does take such measures, they can be used as justification for a military response from Turkey.

This will give the US and Turkey a freer hand to prosecute their campaign of destabilization. The *New York Times* reported on Tuesday that the opposition militias “are developing into a more effective fighting force with the help of an increasingly sophisticated network of activists here in southern Turkey that is smuggling crucial supplies across the border, including weapons, communications gear, field hospitals and even salaries for soldiers who defect.”

The CIA is already directing arms to the opposition

forces while seeking to organize them into an effective fighting force. The Syrian “rebels” are in fact a proxy force for US imperialism and its allies.

While threatening war, NATO and Turkey have provided no new evidence to support their account of the shooting down of the Turkish warplane, which Syria maintains was inside Syrian airspace. Turkey claims that the plane did briefly enter Syrian airspace, but was two kilometers outside at the time it was shot down.

At a press conference Tuesday, NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen called the shooting down of the plane “unacceptable” and said the NATO countries stood together “in the spirit of strong solidarity” with Turkey. The shooting down of the jet, he claimed, “is another example of the Syrian authorities’ disregard for international norms, peace and security, and human life.”

However, Rasmussen refused to answer any questions from journalists about the details of the incident itself.

While Turkey claims the plane was on a mission to test Turkish radar, several commentators have speculated that it may have been seeking to determine the location of Syrian air defense systems. Any attempt to provide greater coverage for oppositional forces or carry out a direct military attack would have to take out these systems.

There are many inconsistencies in the Turkish-NATO account of the incident, including the fact that the plane wreckage landed in Syrian waters.

Syrian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Jihad Makdissi said on Tuesday that Syria had given the Turkish government wreckage from the fighter, including the tail, where “you can see clearly the holes and traces of the machine gun” bullets that took down the plane. The maximum range of these guns is 2.5 kilometers, which would not allow them to shoot down a plane outside of Syrian airspace (which extends 22 kilometers from the coastline).

An account published on the Syrian state media web site stated that the plane was traveling at a very low altitude towards Syria, below the reach of radar. It was shot down when it appeared “one to two kilometers from the beach and Syrian land, and became suddenly visible to the naked eye.”

Regardless of the specific circumstances, the United

States has clearly decided to use the incident to shift its campaign against the Assad government to a new stage. The basic aim of the Obama administration is the overthrow of the Syrian government, which it is determined to achieve in one form or another. Its broader aim is to establish more direct control over the Middle East and Central Asia, an agenda that has already produced wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Any military conflict with Syria could quickly involve its principal allies—Iran, Russia and China. American imperialism is creating the conditions for a global catastrophe.

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