

# Imperialist powers threaten to escalate intervention as Assad beats back opposition

By Johannes Stern  
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The Syrian war is developing into a major international crisis, as Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's regime beats back the Western-backed Islamist opposition and plans for so-called "peace talks" brokered by Russia and the imperialist powers break down.

Yesterday on Al-Manar TV, which is affiliated to the Lebanese Shia militia Hezbollah, Assad announced that "the Syrian army has scored major victories against armed rebels on the ground, and the balance of power is now with the Syrian army."

In recent weeks, the Syrian army supported by Hezbollah has launched an offensive to recapture the key strategic town of Qusayr, close to the Lebanese border, and driven back the rebels in other parts of the country.

Assad said there is "a world war being waged against Syria and the policy of [anti-Israeli] resistance ... [but] we are very confident of victory." He threatened "to retaliate for any Israeli aggression next time," and suggested the possibility of renewed fighting in the Golan Heights, the border region between Syria and Israel occupied by Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967.

Assad warned that there is "is clear popular pressure to open the Golan front to resistance," and that the Syrian government had received "many Arab delegations wanting to know how young people might be enrolled to come and fight Israel."

Israel already targeted Syria with three air strikes over the last month—allegedly destroying Iranian missiles destined for Hezbollah that is backing Assad—and threatened more strikes against Syria if Russia deploys a S-300 air defence system to the country.

Asked about Russian weapons deliveries to Damascus, Assad answered that "Russia is committed

with Syria in implementing these contracts. What we agreed upon with Russia will be implemented, and part of it has been implemented over the recent period, and we are continuing to implement it."

There is much speculation in the Western media and amongst security officials over whether the delivery of the first shipment of S-300 air defence missiles has already had taken place.

On Tuesday, Russian Deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov had announced at a press conference in Moscow that Russia would go ahead with the delivery of the S-300 system to Syria, after the decision by the European powers to lift the arms embargo against Syria on Monday. The decision allows each European country to directly arm opposition forces.

The British *Guardian* quoted a high-ranking Israeli official: "There's big confusion here – some people say the missiles are already there [in Syria], others are expected them to arrive at any moment. We are trying to find out exactly what the situation is but currently we just don't know." However, the official added, "this move will certainly change the whole dynamic [of Israeli involvement in the Syrian conflict]. This is mostly as a result of the EU's reckless decision to lift the arms embargo."

Major General Giora Eiland, a former Israeli national security adviser, added that strikes against the S-300 system threaten not only an Israeli war with Syria, but also with Russia: "If we do something soon after the transfer, we might have business not only with Syria but with the Russians. This is a real hot potato."

Recently, Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon had warned that if the shipments "do arrive in Syria, God forbid, we'll know what to do."

As the Syrian "rebels" lose ground, US-imperialism is reiterating its threats to install a "no-fly-zone" in

Syria and increase its military support. At a press briefing on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney welcomed “the EU action” to lift the arms embargo against Syria, stressing that “the possibility of a no-fly-zone remains on the table.”

Amid this escalating crisis, plans for talks on Geneva over Syria have collapsed. The Western-backed opposition announced that it would not participate in the Geneva conference—a joint US-Russian initiative for talks between the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad and the opposition, scheduled for mid-June.

“The National Coalition will not take part in any international conference or any such efforts so long as the militias of Iran and Hezbollah continue their invasion of Syria,” the head of the opposition umbrella Syrian National Coalition (SNC), George Sabra, declared Thursday in Istanbul.

Pointing to the military advances by the Syrian army against the “rebels,” Sabra added that “in light of this savagery, any talk of an international conference or a political solution in Syria is just meaningless chatter.”

Assad, for his part, agreed “in principle” to participate in the so-called “Geneva peace conference”

“The only condition is that anything to be implemented will be submitted to Syrian public opinion and a Syrian referendum,” he added.

Defying calls by the imperialist powers and the Western-backed opposition to step down he vowed to stay in power until the next presidential elections in 2014 and announced that he “will not hesitate to stand again” if “there is any need” for his candidacy.

Facing a military defeat in Qusayr and without any significant support amongst the Syrian population, the “rebels” are issuing desperate appeals to their imperialist backers to escalate their intervention.

In a statement on Wednesday the SNC called on the EU to “solidify” its words by action and supply the Free Syrian Army (FSA) with “specialized weaponry to repel fierce attacks” by the regime forces.

The leader of the FSA, former Syrian general and defector, Salem Idris, made an appeal to the imperialist powers to intervene. On the BBC World Newshour program he declared: “We are dying. Please come and help us.” He warned of a possible “massacre” if the US and its allies did not intervene to assist him.

In reality, opposition forces are responsible for horrific crimes against the entire Syrian people. Earlier

this week, UN high commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay stated that accounts gathered by a UN monitoring team “suggest that armed groups have apparently used civilians as human shields and that abductions are increasing.” Other accounts “include allegations that certain opposition groups have forced young women and minor girls to marry combatants” and “reports of anti-government groups committing gruesome crimes such as torture and extrajudicial executions.”

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