

As opposition to war mounts, Pentagon plans massive attack on Syria

By Bill Van Auken
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Facing overwhelming opposition to its war plans among the American people, the prospect of losing a vote in Congress on a resolution authorizing military force, and unprecedented isolation on the world stage, the Obama administration has reportedly ordered the Pentagon to plan a far wider attack on Syria than had originally been indicated.

Obama is “now determined to put more emphasis on the ‘degrade’ part of what the administration has said is the goal of a military strike against Syria—to ‘deter and degrade’ Mr. Assad’s ability to use chemical weapons,” the *New York Times* reported Friday, citing unnamed Pentagon officials.

According to the *Times*, as well as similar reports by the *Wall Street Journal* and CNN, the Syria war plan is evolving to include not just a salvo of cruise missiles from a US naval flotilla deployed in the eastern Mediterranean, but a sustained bombing campaign involving US warplanes flying from bases in the region as well from the US itself.

The *Journal* reported that the use of Air Force bombers, which are capable of delivering a greater payload than the ship-borne missiles, is being considered for strikes on “hardened targets” and “follow-on strikes if the first wave doesn’t destroy the targets.”

“Among options available are B-52 bombers, which can carry cruise missiles; low-flying B1s that are based in Qatar and carry long-range, air-to-surface missiles; and B-2 stealth bombers, which are based in Missouri and carry heavy guided bombs,” according to the *Journal*.

In the face of such preparations, only the willfully ignorant can still believe that the attack being prepared against Syria has anything to do with upholding “international norms” and punishing the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad for allegedly using chemical weapons.

The Obama administration has yet to present a shred of

verifiable evidence to substantiate its claim that the Assad regime was responsible for the alleged August 21 chemical attack outside Damascus.

The American president suffered an unmitigated fiasco at the G20 summit in Russia, where he was unable to convince a single government to support US military action. If evidence of such an attack could be shared anywhere, it would presumably be with the heads of state gathered in St. Petersburg. But Obama has no such proof, and every government in the world knows it.

The August 21 event was a provocation staged by Washington and its proxies, the armed Islamist militias led by Al Qaeda, to provide the justification for not only an attack on Syria, but a far wider war.

In the first instance, what is being prepared is a full-scale assault on the Syrian government and its military. Among the objectives will be the assassination of Assad and the wiping out of much of the Syrian army. In the process, thousands of Syrian civilians—men, women and children—will be killed as well.

These aims are being spelled out clearly within the US ruling establishment. A report published September 5 by Anthony Cordesman, a leading analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and former Pentagon intelligence official, is entitled “Shaping a Meaningful Outcome to US Strikes and Intervention in the Syrian Civil War.”

“If the US is to accomplish any lasting strategic result, it must carry out a truly major cruise missile strike and focus on changing the outcome of the Syrian civil war, rather than focus on Syria’s chemical weapons,” Cordesman writes. “In the short term, this means a focus on high value military targets that will have an impact on the civil war rather than a focus on chemical weapons.”

He continues by insisting that “making a limited, short-term tilt in the balance will not be enough.” The US attack, he argues, must be accompanied by a major

escalation of the arming of the so-called “rebels,” the fascistic Islamist gunmen carrying out a sectarian civil war on Washington’s behalf.

This is already taking place. The *Times* of London reported Friday, “The CIA is supervising fresh weapons consignments from Saudi Arabia and other Arab states to Syria’s rebels to help them to capitalise on a US bombing offensive that could start next week.”

The massive new infusion of weaponry includes antitank weapons and surface-to-air missiles as well as other arms. It likely also involves chemical weapons from the Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar bin Sultan al-Saud, to be used should another provocation be required.

These weapons will go to Al Qaeda-led militias, with which the US government is now working in the closest operational unity, to carry out sectarian massacres across the country and in Damascus itself.

The aim of this campaign is not limited to Syria, but is directed at preparing a wider regional war, targeting Iran, with the aim of removing all impediments to US imperialist hegemony over the oil-rich and strategically vital regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Obama is pursuing the same predatory aims that lay behind the wars fought in Iraq and Afghanistan over the entire past decade.

The US Senate convened briefly Friday to allow Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to formally introduce the Authorization for the Use of Military Force resolution adopted by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The full Senate returns from its recess on Monday and is expected to vote on the measure backing war on Syria as soon as next Wednesday.

The resolution provides for up to 60 days of air strikes on the already devastated Middle Eastern nation, with another 30-day extension should the Obama administration determine that more attacks are required.

Whatever the text of the legislation, and whether or not it is passed by both houses of Congress, which appears increasingly doubtful, the administration has already made clear the far-reaching scope of its military aims with the draft it first submitted. This resolution allowed it to use virtually unlimited military force “in connection with” Syrian chemical weapons and the proliferation “within, to or from Syria,” of such weapons or any components or materials associated with them. Such language would allow attacks on Iran or Russia or virtually any other country that the US determined was “connected” with Syria or providing it with aid.

That this remains the aim of the US intervention was indicated by last week’s presence in Washington of a large delegation of top Israeli military and intelligence officials and the steady drumbeat of propaganda to the effect that the Syrian intervention is necessary to deter Iran from securing a nuclear weapon.

As the *New York Times* noted Friday, the Obama administration is counting heavily on Zionist lobbying organizations such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to pressure members of Congress to back the authorization of military force.

Whatever the results of the congressional deliberations, this will be the last time any legislative debate is carried out in the US over the impending war. Such is the depth of the crisis of US capitalism, it is driven to a war of aggression, regardless the attitude of the American people, as a means of offsetting its economic decline and intense internal contradictions.

This is a government of conspiracy, dominated by its vast military and intelligence apparatus and totally subservient to the interests of the corporations, the banks and the super-rich. It is dragging the American people into war on the basis of wholesale lying and under conditions where the overwhelming majority of the population opposes military action—something Obama and his supporters acknowledge. Ultimately, this can be carried out only by means of massive repression.

The only thing that can stop the coming war is the mobilization of mass popular opposition. This requires the independent action of working people, students and youth in opposition to the Obama administration, the Congress and both big-business political parties. The struggle against war must be joined with the fight to defend living standards and basic democratic rights, which are under relentless assault by the same capitalist system and ruling financial oligarchy that are the source of militarism and imperialist aggression.

The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to organize this opposition, holding meetings and calling demonstrations across the US and internationally. We call upon all of our readers and supporters to join this fight today.

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