

Geneva talks begin as US-backed war in Syria expands

By Bill Van Auken
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Talks opened in Geneva, Switzerland Monday on the four-year-old war that has killed over 260,000 Syrians and turned millions more into refugees. There is no reason to believe that this United Nations-mediated process will bring any end to the carnage.

The peace talks are starting a full week after their scheduled opening because of bitter divisions over who was to represent so-called rebels and other political forces opposed to the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

In the end, the United Nations envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, bowed to pressure from Washington and its regional allies—Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar—agreeing to allow the “High Negotiation Committee” (HNC), a bloc cobbled together by the Saudi monarchy, to serve as the exclusive representative of the opposition. Even after this decision, there was further delay amid reports of heated debates within this body over whether or not to go to Geneva.

The head of the HNC delegation is former Syrian Prime Minister Riad Hijab, who counts as one of the highest-level Syrian officials to have defected under a Western program to “incentivize” such turncoats, in this case, with a suitcase full of cash provided by French intelligence.

Its chief negotiator is Mohammed Alloush, leader of the Army of Islam (Jaysh al-Islam), a Salafist jihadi militia that collaborates closely with Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate, the al-Nusra Front. Its rabidly sectarian ideology, inspired by the Wahhabi bigotry of the Saudi monarchy, which serves as its principal patron, calls for the annihilation of millions of Shia Muslims worldwide and the restoration of the seventh century Caliphate. Alloush is what US officials fondly refer to as a “moderate.”

That these two individuals are representative of the Western-backed “rebels”—and what pseudo-left groups like the French New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and the American International Socialist Organization (ISO) hail as the “Syrian revolution”—is indisputable. The pretense, however, that this collection of Western intelligence assets, ultra-reactionaries and religious fanatics represents the aspirations of the Syrian people is an abomination.

The political agenda of these elements was underscored on the eve of the talks by a terrorist bombing at a Shia religious shrine just outside of the Syrian capital in which at least 72 people were killed and scores more wounded.

As the talks began, US Secretary of State John Kerry issued a videotaped statement declaring: “For almost five years, the world has watched in horror as Syria has disintegrated into a brutal conflict, killing hundreds of thousands and displacing millions both within and outside the country.”

The talks, he added, provided the means “to reduce the violence, isolate terrorist groups such as Daesh, and create the basis for an inclusive, peaceful and pluralistic Syria we all seek.”

Who does Kerry think he’s kidding? Washington is not some innocent bystander, looking on “in horror” at the decimation of Syria. US imperialism bears chief responsibility for the bloodshed. The CIA has orchestrated the financing and arming of the Islamist militias, in collaboration with the Turkish government and the Saudi and Qatari monarchies, in a war for regime change.

In fact, Washington has systematically escalated its military violence in Syria in the weeks preceding the opening of the talks in Geneva, announcing hundreds of additional troops, stepped-up air strikes and an

expansion of aid to the “rebels.”

As for Daesh, or ISIS, it is in every sense of the word Washington’s Frankenstein monster. It is a byproduct of the US invasion of Iraq and the sectarian turmoil instigated by the divide-and-rule methods employed by the subsequent American occupation. It was dramatically strengthened by the US-NATO war for regime change in Libya, which employed similar Al Qaeda-linked Islamist fighters as proxy troops. In the war’s aftermath, it funneled these fighters and large quantities of Libyan arms into Syria.

The US and its allies blew up the so-called Geneva II talks held in Montreux two years ago by making the immediate transfer of power from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad a non-negotiable demand. If the Obama administration is pushing for its Islamist proxies in Syria to participate in the Geneva talks, it is because they have proven incapable of securing the aim of regime change by force of arms and are suffering mounting defeats at the hands of Syrian government forces backed by Russian air strikes.

US objectives, however, remain unchanged. When Kerry talks about an “inclusive, peaceful and pluralistic Syria,” what he means is the installation of an American puppet in Damascus. Washington hopes that by means of threats, pressure and bribery to secure the collaboration of Iran and Russia—together with elements in Syria’s national bourgeoisie and the Assad regime itself—it will achieve such an outcome.

But the US has enunciated not even the outlines of a strategy for establishing a stable client regime. There is no indication that any of the so-called rebels have the capacity to govern Syria. Nor is there any sign of a plan or policy that could resurrect a country that has seen more than half of its population displaced and much of its basic infrastructure demolished.

In the end, the debacles created by American military interventions in Iraq, Libya and Syria have succeeded not in installing reliable puppets, but rather in destroying entire societies.

Driven by the insoluble contradictions of American capitalism and the desperate attempts of the American ruling class to reverse its declining influence on the world stage by military means, the only discernible policy being pursued by Washington is one of perpetual war. It is aimed at preventing the emergence of any global or even regional rival capable of ending

the hegemony of the US-based banks and multinationals in any corner of the planet, no matter what the cost in terms of human life.

The millions of dead, wounded and displaced Iraqis, Afghans, Libyans and Syrians are the victims of this endless and escalating US war drive, with many millions more to follow. The carnage will not be stopped by negotiations or peace talks in Geneva, which will serve only as the antechamber of new and bloodier conflicts. There is no means to halt the momentum toward world war outside of the political intervention of the working class in the struggle for socialism.

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