

U.S., U.K., and Allies Escalate Against Syria

by Hussein Askary

March 19—Following the early-March operations carried out by the Syrian Army to remove the armed groups controlling the central parts of the cities of Homs and Idlib, a major shift on the ground and internationally has taken place. While Damascus has reclaimed control over most of the country, including its borders with Lebanon and Turkey, from which arms and militants had been pouring in to support the Syrian insurgents, the hysteria is increasing among the allies of the United States and Britain, especially Saudi Arabia and Turkey, to launch a military offensive against the country.

This Russian and Chinese intervention in the UN Security Council last week generated further hysteria, as they practically removed from the discussion table any talk of regime-change, or of the Syrian President stepping aside. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov presented a five-point program, including ceasefire on all sides, sending monitors to oversee the ceasefire, starting negotiations between the government and the opposition, supporting a political solution through the mission of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and providing unhindered humanitarian aid.

Another aspect of the collapse of the operation to impose regime-change from within Syria, was the fall-out in the Syrian opposition's main group, the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Syrian National Council (SNC). Three leading members of the SNC (Haitham al-Maleh, Kamal al-Labwani, and Catherine al-Telli) defected on March 14, and Labwani accused the SNC of being "accomplices in the bloodshed in Syria." Al-Maleh even accused the Anglo-French-backed head of the SNC, Burhan Ghalioun, of running the group with dictatorial rule. Even intelligence and military insiders in the U.S. have deemed this group untrustworthy.

While the control of the Western/Saudi-backed militants in key cities in Syria is weakened, al-Qaeda terrorist attacks against both government institutions and civilians continue. On March 16, two car bombs exploded in Damascus, killing 29 and wounding more than a hundred, many of whom were employees in the



While Damascus has reclaimed control over most of the country, arms and militants, crossing the border from Lebanon and Turkey, are pouring in to support the insurgents. Shown: a terrorist bombing in Aleppo, Feb. 11.

aviation intelligence offices. The next day, a car bomb exploded in a residential area in Aleppo, killing three.

These attacks came simultaneously with the shutdown by Saudi Arabia, other Gulf States, and a number of EU countries, of their embassies in Damascus, in a move coordinated between the Saudis and British EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Catherine Ashton. Turkey, on the other hand, is being pressured by the Saudis and the U.S.-British-French alliance to launch an offensive into Syria to establish a humanitarian zone to allegedly protect Syrian refugees. If allowed to happen, this would trigger a direct military confrontation between the Turkish and Syrian armies, which could be used by the Western alliance to launch a larger military offensive, similar to the one against Libya last year.

An Ominous Russian Response

In the meantime, and more ominously, Russian officials are warning that such Anglo-American interventions, whether against Iran or Syria, could force Russia to intervene, leading to a global conflict. The Russian daily *Ekho Moskvy* reported on March 14 that the Russian General Staff has developed an action plan for the eventuality of strikes against Iran. The daily *Kommersant* reported that Defense Ministry sources warned, “We have worked through our actions for the case of war with Iran. We are mobilization-ready for that eventuality.”

Russia is ready for both the huge number of refugees that might result, as well as the re-ignition of old conflicts, such as that between Azerbaijan and Armenia over

Nagorno-Karabakh. On the same day, *Russia Today* cited Chief of Staff Gen. Nikolai Makarov’s November 2011 address to the Russian Public Chamber, warning that the danger of local armed conflicts along Russia’s borders had grown: “The possibility of local armed conflicts virtually along the entire perimeter of the border has grown dramatically. I cannot rule out, that in certain circumstances, local and regional armed conflicts could grow into a large-scale war, possibly even with nuclear weapons.”

Last week, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov warned the West that allegations that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s

regime is illegitimate are unacceptable, and not likely to foster a peaceful settlement: “In our view, such opinions are counterproductive, as they give a false signal to the opposition that there is no reason to engage in dialogue; that it’s better to expect help from NATO and the West, as was the case in Libya. We believe that this scenario is absolutely inadmissible, and it will have grave consequences for Syrians and the stability in the region.” Bogdanov condemned Saudi Arabia’s decision to shut its embassy in Syria.

Interestingly, while Christian leaders in both Syria and Lebanon have been denouncing the Western support for the Islamist insurgents in Syria, whose actions could lead to religious war throughout the region, the Saudis, who are allies of the U.S. and Europe, are fomenting religious wars through their Salafi-Wahhabi pseudo-religious incitements. The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdul-Aziz Al-Asheikh, told Kuwaiti students in a meeting on March 12, that all churches in the Arab Peninsula should be destroyed, because accepting them would mean accepting a religion other than Islam. He also urged his followers to send money and support to the insurgents in Syria, because that is considered to be Jihad (holy war).

The Saudis, who are oppressing their own minorities, and crushing any protests or opposition to the Al-Saud dictatorial and autocratic rule, and are occupying Bahrain to protect the monarch there against demands for political reform, are the most active Anglo-American allies in the regime-change scheme against Syria.