



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on August 22, 2011

Potential Syria Intervention May Lead to Wider War

As protests and unrest continue to spread across Syria, Western pressure including sanctions and even open talk of military intervention is mounting against the regime of “President” Bashar Al-Assad (left). Numerous sources report that NATO is already plotting an invasion as foreign powers covertly arm Syrian rebels. And some analysts believe military intervention against Damascus would merely serve as a prelude to an attack on Iran.



Mass demonstrations in Syria, sometimes violent, began in mid-March. Since then, human rights groups and various governments claim thousands of civilians have been killed by security forces trying to put down the unrest.

The European Union and the U.S. government already imposed economic sanctions on the Assad dictatorship. More might be on the way as EU officials consider joining the American embargo on Syrian oil imports.

Meanwhile, the United Nations [sent](#) a team to Syria over the weekend to investigate the government crackdown. And a UN report released late last week [suggested](#) Syrian forces may have committed crimes against humanity.

But amid widespread international condemnation of Assad, the Obama administration and various American officials have emerged as among the most vocal critics so far. President Obama even called for Assad to step down and leave Syria earlier this month. And the State Department has been busy building international support for its anti-Assad campaign.

“The United States will continue to work with our partners to turn this growing consensus into increased pressure and isolation for the Assad regime,” U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a [recent press conference](#), citing European and Middle Eastern governments that had also condemned the Syrian government. “President Assad has lost the legitimacy to lead, and it is clear that Syria would be better off without him.”

Clinton urged governments to further isolate the Syrian dictator through economic and military means: essentially, refusing to buy Syrian oil or sell weapons to the regime. She also called on authorities around the world to “get on the right side of history” by turning against Assad while demanding that the Syrian government agree to a “democratic transition.”

Among the biggest public advocates of military intervention have been American legislators. U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), for example, [suggested](#) a UN-backed “humanitarian” war similar to the NATO campaign in Libya might be a suitable option.

“If it made sense to protect the Libyan people against Kaddafi, and it did because they were going to



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get slaughtered if we hadn't sent NATO in when he was on the outskirts of Benghazi, the question for the world [is], have we gotten to that point in Syria," he told CBS in mid-June. "We may not be there yet, but we are getting very close."

Tensions have escalated significantly since then.

A sought-after UN resolution demanding international "humanitarian" intervention through military force has failed to materialize so far. But the Russian government's envoy to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, said earlier this month that NATO was already planning a military campaign to overthrow Assad, with the eventual goal of taking down the government of Iran as well.

"The noose around Iran is tightening," he was [quoted as saying](#) by Russian state news agency RIA Novosti. "Military planning against Iran is underway. And we are certainly concerned about an escalation of a large-scale war in this huge region."

Citing the potential for devastating international consequences from more war and the lessons learned from Libya, Rogozin said the Russian government would continue to oppose any UN resolutions calling for military intervention. But according to Western officials cited in news reports, [blueprints for a NATO attack on Syria have already been drafted](#).

Meanwhile, Assad said reforms were underway and warned against foreign intervention during a televised statement over the weekend. "Any action against Syria will have greater consequences [on those who carry it out], greater than they can tolerate," he was [quoted as saying](#) by Al Jazeera. "First, because of Syria's geopolitical location and second [because of] Syrian capabilities. They know part of it but they do not know the other parts and they will not be able to afford the results."

The Syrian regime continues to claim that there is a "conspiracy" using "armed gangs" to overthrow the government. And many Western analysts [agree](#) that there is at least much more to the story than the narrative promoted in the international press thus far.

While the uprising has generally been portrayed in establishment media outlets as a peaceful demonstration being brutally suppressed by a power-hungry dictator, the true situation is obviously not that simple. And when protests began in March of this year, news reports showed that there was indeed another side to the story.

According to [Israel National News](#), at least seven police officers were killed by anti-government forces during the early days of the original protests. Rebels also set ablaze the ruling Baath Party headquarters and a local court.

Security forces responded by firing on the "armed protesters," killing four and injuring dozens more. Many demonstrations since then have indeed been peaceful. But even this month, the Israeli open-source intelligence outfit known as Debka [claimed](#) some Syrian protesters were armed with "heavy machine guns" and anti-tank defenses.

Among the outside forces suspected of involvement in the Syrian uprising are Islamic extremist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Hizb ut-Tahrir, which reportedly hope to topple the secular Assad regime. Western powers and Turkey, according to Debka, are also said to be [arming and training rebels](#).

U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks also [show](#) that the U.S. government was secretly funding Syrian opposition groups and even a rebel TV station until at least September of 2010. After the regime became suspicious of the activities, however, a 2009 cable suggested a change of tactics.



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“A reassessment of current U.S.-sponsored programming that supports anti-[government] factions, both inside and outside Syria, may prove productive,” the U.S. embassy cable from Damascus stated. Anti-Assad groups outside of Syria were also heavily financed by the U.S. State Department as part of what the *Washington Post* [called](#) a “long-standing campaign to overthrow the country’s autocratic leader, Bashar al-Assad.”

Commentators have raised other important questions about the reality on the ground in Syria, too. One of the most elaborate hoaxes, [exposed as a fraud](#) in June, involved a supposed lesbian blogger living in Damascus. The fake stories duped countless media outlets around the world including the Associated Press, the BBC, and many more.

After drawing international attention and news coverage, a post appeared on the blog claiming the “Gay Girl,” as the fake character was known, had been seized by the regime. Weeks later the scam completely crumbled as the true author — an American — was exposed. Speculation about the possible involvement of Western intelligence agencies subsequently exploded.

And while there is no doubt that Syrian despot Assad is brutal and autocratic, according to some experts, the deception runs much deeper than the bogus Gay Girl. In fact, the whole public image of what is truly happening in Syria may be wildly distorted.

“Syrians want change,” former British intelligence MI6 officer Alastair Crooke, who serves a high-level EU advisor and runs a non-governmental organization in Lebanon, [told](#) the *EU Observer* online newspaper. “But whether Westerners believe it or not, most people in Damascus, in Aleppo, the middle classes, the merchant classes and the [sectarian] minorities believe Assad is the only person who can bring in reforms.”

Crooke said the two things Syrians are most afraid of include civil war and Western military intervention. And he noted that outside forces including foreign Islamists and the U.S. government were largely behind the efforts to bring down the Assad regime — often through deception.

Regardless of what is really going on, however, the geopolitical implications of the situation in Syria are monumental. Analysts have speculated that after “regime change” in Syria, the Islamic dictatorship of Iran will be the next target. And since the Iranian regime maintains close ties with the Russian and Chinese governments, the possibility of a wide-scale war that has been contemplated for years becomes more and more plausible.

The Russian government has also maintained relatively warm links with the Assad regime, emerging as one of its main defenders on the UN Security Council. Russia even sold advanced weaponry to the Syrian government, and it possesses a military base in the country.

So, according to observers, the potential for an expanded conflict certainly exists. And Iran would almost certainly be next on the list.

Retired U.S. General Wesley Clark, who served as the Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO until 2000, made an astonishing claim during a [2007 TV interview](#) that would seem to support such a scenario. Clark said that while serving in the Defense Department in late 2001, he learned of a plan to make war on seven nations including Iraq, Libya, Syria and Somalia — and, eventually, Iran.

American analysts have warned for years about the potential danger of an attack on Iran. But even a military campaign against Syria could lead to massive problems.

“Any force used on Syria would be a total shot in the dark, a hope the military under attack will turn on



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the regime,” cautioned former CIA officer Robert Baer, who served in Syria, [as quoted](#) by the Center for Research on Globalization. “But when has this ever happened? It didn’t with [late Iraqi leader] Saddam or [Libyan leader] Gaddafi.”

Where the conflict goes from here remains to be seen. Some European governments have recently said a military invasion of Syria was off the table for now. But with the credibility of governments on all sides — the Syrian dictatorship as well as Western authorities — increasingly under fire, the truth remains elusive.



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