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The US “Plan B” for Syria and the threat of world war

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Negotiations on Syria’s bloody armed conflict were held in Munich Thursday against the backdrop of a government offensive, supported by Russian airstrikes, to break the grip of Western-backed “rebels” over the largely shattered eastern part of Aleppo.

The talks were convened under the auspices of the 17-member International Syria Support Group, which includes the US and its regional allies—Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar—in the war for regime change in Syria, along with Russia and Iran, which are allied with and actively aiding the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Washington demanded an immediate cease-fire and halt to Russian airstrikes in Syria. The US, together with the reactionary Arab monarchies and the regime in Turkey, fears that without a halt to the fighting, the Islamist militias that they have supported, financed and armed for nearly five years may face irreparable defeat.

Russia, for its part, reportedly proposed a cease-fire that would begin on March 1, thus allowing enough time for the Syrian government to reestablish its control over Aleppo.

Late Thursday night, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced that they had reached a tentative deal that would see a ceasefire “within a

week” along with expedited humanitarian aid. Kerry allowed that while the agreement looked good “on paper,” it was yet to be tested. All of the underlying conflicts remain unresolved, and both US and Russian military operations are to continue in the name of the struggle against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

On the eve of the Munich talks, Kerry, in an interview with *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius, delivered an unmistakable threat in connection with the US negotiating strategy in Munich: “What we’re doing is testing [Russian and Iranian] seriousness.” he said. “And if they’re not serious, then there has to be consideration of a Plan B... You can’t just sit there.”

“Plan B” would consist of a sharp escalation of the US military intervention in Syria, carried out under the cover of combating ISIS, but directed at toppling the Assad government.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar have also reportedly spent the last several days discussing a “Plan B” that would involve their participation in direct military intervention to save the “rebels” that they have supported. The Saudi-owned news group al-Arabiya has quoted officials in Riyadh as confirming the House of Saud’s decision to send troops into Syria in what would constitute a provocatively hostile invasion.

Responding to the ominous implications of such an escalation, Russia’s Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev told the German daily *Handelsblatt* Thursday: “The Americans and our Arab partners must think hard about this—do they want a permanent war? All sides must be forced to the negotiating table instead of sparking a new world war.”

Medvedev’s choice of words was not mere hyperbole. A military intervention to rescue the “rebels,” which amounts to a war to save Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate, the Al Nusra Front, the leading force on the ground in Aleppo province, could quickly bring the US and its allies into combat with Russia, an armed confrontation between the world’s two major nuclear powers.

US officials have spoken in recent days of creating a “humanitarian corridor” to Aleppo and other rebel areas under siege by government forces. Presumably this “corridor” is meant to replace the main supply route for the “rebels” from Turkey, which has been cut off by the government offensive, disrupting the CIA-orchestrated arming of the “rebels” with stockpiles poured in from Libya, the Gulf oil kingdoms and beyond. Such a corridor would require a military force to protect it and enforcement of a “no-fly zone,” meaning a confrontation not only with Syrian government forces, but with Russian warplanes as well.

Turkey, Washington’s NATO ally, is meanwhile blocking its border to Syrian refugees in order to create the maximum crisis possible so that it can pursue its own strategic aims, which include not only regime change in Damascus, but also the bloody suppression of the Kurdish minority on both sides of the frontier.

The Obama administration has issued no warning to the American people that it is embarking on a policy in Syria that could pit the US against the Russian military and potentially trigger a global catastrophe.

There is no significant popular support for US military intervention in Syria, which has been promoted under the false flag of “humanitarianism,” aided by a whole coterie of pseudo-left organizations that have specialized in portraying a bloody sectarian campaign by CIA-backed Islamist militias as a “Syrian revolution.”

The extent of the catastrophe unleashed upon Syria through this intervention was spelled out in shocking terms with the release of a new study by the Syrian Center for Policy Research, which found that fully 11.5 per cent of the population inside Syria has been either killed or injured as a result of the armed conflict. The death toll from the war—combined with the systematic destruction of the country’s social infrastructure and health care system and a dramatic drop in living standards—has caused life expectancy to plummet from 70.5 years in 2010 to an estimated 55.4 years in 2015.

The study found further that the country’s unemployment rate had soared from 14.9 percent in 2011 to 52.9 percent by the end of 2015, and that the overall poverty rate is estimated at 85.2 percent.

In short, the Obama administration has inflicted upon Syria a war that is every bit as criminal and lethal as the war carried out by the Bush administration against Iraq.

The Syrian people are the victims of a US-orchestrated war that is driven by the global strategy of American imperialism to reverse its economic decline through the use or threat of military force. Washington sought regime change in Syria as a means to an end: the weakening of the two principal allies of Damascus, Russia and Iran, and the reassertion of a Western stranglehold on the vast energy resources of the Middle East.

The threat of world war is posed not merely by the prospect of US and Russian warplanes facing off in the skies over Syria, but by the entire logic of the Syrian war for regime change and the broader strategic aims that it serves. This finds expression in NATO’s escalation of the military encirclement of Russia and the increasingly provocative anti-Chinese policy being pursued by the Pentagon in the South China Sea.

The US drive for global hegemony was articulated in the strategic maxim enunciated by the Pentagon nearly a quarter of a century ago that Washington must prevent the emergence of any power capable of challenging the dominance of American capitalism on a global or even regional scale. This “grand strategy” has led to unceasing US wars of aggression since and now poses the real threat of a third, nuclear, world war.

Against this barbaric strategy of the US ruling establishment, the American and international working class must advance its own independent strategy, fighting for the withdrawal of US and all foreign military forces from Syria, Iraq and the entire Middle East and for the unity of the working class across all national, religious and ethnic boundaries in a common struggle to put an end to capitalism, the source of militarism and war.