

After veto of UN war resolution: Washington steps up drive to overthrow Syrian regime

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[Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

Following its failure to ram through a resolution against Syria at the United Nations Security Council last week, the administration of Barack Obama has intensified its preparations to gather a "coalition of the willing" to oust the government of Syria and install a US client regime.

The resolution would have imposed new sanctions against Damascus under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which authorizes the use of military force. The last such resolution by the council was used by the US and NATO to justify their war for regime-change in Libya.

The US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, condemned Moscow and Beijing for vetoing the anti-Syrian resolution and declared that Washington would "work with a diverse range of partners outside the Security Council" to undermine the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

These partners include Britain and France, the former colonial powers in the region, and the Sunni monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which have provided hundreds of millions of dollars in arms and financial support to the Islamist-dominated Syrian opposition militias.

The *New York Times* reported Sunday that the White House is "now holding daily high-level meetings" on Syria "to discuss a broad range of contingency plans."

Senior figures from the Obama administration and the Pentagon are also in discussions with their Israeli counterparts to prepare for an attack on Syria. US National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon was in Israel for talks last week and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta is due to visit Jerusalem in the next few days to discuss the situation in Syria.

Echoing the bogus "weapons of mass destruction" campaign used in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Washington and its allies are increasingly citing Syria's alleged chemical weapons arsenal as a potential *casus belli* against the Assad government. "We are well aware that Syria has large stockpiles of chemical weapons," Ambassador Rice told National Public Radio Friday, adding, "Syria has a legal and moral obligation to secure them... Should anyone in the Syrian regime do otherwise they will be held accountable."

Republican Senator John McCain on Sunday made even more bellicose statements concerning the alleged threat of Syrian weapons, telling CNN's "State of the Union" program that Assad could deploy chemical weapons against his own people and declaring that the US had an obligation to militarily intervene in Syria.

The Israeli government stated that it is prepared to launch a unilateral attack on Syria in order to prevent Islamist militants gaining access to chemical weapons. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barack said he had “ordered the Israeli military to prepare for a situation where we would have to weigh the possibility of carrying out an attack” on Syrian military bases reported to house chemical weapons stockpiles.

Speaking on the “Fox News Sunday” program, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated that his government was prepared to take military action to prevent “chemical weapons falling into the hands of Hezbollah or some other terror groups.”

Such expressions of concern from Israeli and US officials about Islamist militants gaining access to chemical weapons reek of hypocrisy. If there is a threat of terrorist groups seizing Syrian chemical weapons, it has come about as a direct consequence of the year-old destabilization operation against the regime in Damascus, in which the US, Israel, Britain, France and the pro-Western Persian Gulf monarchies have supplied weaponry, money and intelligence to Syria’s Sunni-extremist opposition militias.

Behind the humbug over chemical weapons, the real US attitude toward Syria was bluntly expressed last week by Andrew Tabler, a member of the influential Washington Institute for Near East Policy, whom the *New York Times* quoted as saying, “We’re looking at the controlled demolition of the Assad regime.”

US officials have acknowledged that the support given to the Syrian opposition by Washington and its allies lies behind the sharp intensification of the conflict into a full-scale civil war over the summer. “You’ll notice in the last couple of months, the opposition has been strengthened,” one senior White House official told the *Times* Sunday edition. “Now we’re ready to accelerate that,” the unnamed source added.

This escalation has been coordinated by the US Central Intelligence Agency, which operates near the Syrian border in Turkey to control the flood of weapons supplied by Saudi Arabia and Qatar to Syrian “rebel” militias.

The mounting violence has forced an estimated 125,000 Syrians to flee the country into neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. Many more have become internal refugees, fleeing areas of heavy fighting for the two main cities of Damascus and Aleppo, which have until recently seen relatively little violence. However, the US-backed opposition has in the past few weeks been able to target these cities with a number of armed assaults and terrorist bombings, such as the blast that killed three top regime officials in the capital’s national security headquarters last week.

There were reports of heavy fighting in several suburbs of Aleppo over the weekend, as well as battles between militants and the armed forces in the capital. On Saturday, the Syrian Army’s elite Fourth Division, commanded by President Assad’s brother, led a counterattack on the opposition fighters in the Damascus suburbs of Barzeh and Mezzeh. Free Syrian Army and Islamist fighters have also been able to take control of several border crossings from Syria into Turkey and Iraq.

The *New York Times* also reported Sunday that Obama administration officials were working with the Syrian “rebels” to set up a provisional government that would include elements from the current regime. Washington is particularly eager to court top Syrian military personnel in the hope that such defections will serve both to undermine Assad and provide a

prop for a new US-sponsored regime in Damascus.

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