

US-NATO WAR ON SYRIA: The Assorted Lies and Limits of Syria's Imperial "Friends"

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Despite proclaiming support for the six-point Syrian peace initiative proposed by joint United Nations-Arab League special envoy Kofi Annan, the N.A.T.O.-G.C.C. alliance continues its effort to unravel the plan at every turn. And in doing so, the lies and ultimate limits of this imperial alliance become further unmasked.

As the first U.N. monitors began arriving in Damascus this past week to oversee the country's fragile ceasefire, the Orwellian deemed "Friends of Syria" rendezvoused in Paris. Of course, the agenda for this consortium of international friends was not how best to uphold the ceasefire and secure peace, but rather how best to impose regime change.

As a matter of fact, as the [New York Times](#) exposed earlier this month, Western diplomats seek nothing less than the complete collapse of the so-called Annan process. As the paper coolly stated: "In some ways, the Annan plan needs to fail—which appears most likely—to persuade Russia and China not to wield their veto on Syria resolutions as they have twice previously."

Questioning the very validity of the Paris summit, then, was none other than Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. As Lavrov [warned](#), "When the so-called Syrian group of friends meet and somebody says 'Now we'll assess how Assad implements Kofi Annan's plan', it is a wrong attempt. We cannot privatize (the plan) and we will not let it happen."

Undeterred by such notes of caution, however, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went on to [declare](#) Thursday, "We have to keep Assad off-balance by leaving all options on the table." The favored refrain of "all options" is of course nothing but a thinly veiled threat of military force.

Clinton also used the meeting to announce plans for the establishment of an "accountability clearinghouse." This clearinghouse, Clinton stated, will "keep track of all the terrible stories of abuses and crimes against humanity that are coming out of Syria." Ostensibly, such evidence will eventually be used to prosecute Syrian government officials.

(One wonders just when the Secretary of State shall announce the establishment of a clearinghouse to track all the terrible stories of abuse and crimes against humanity that are coming out of the U.S. war on Afghanistan. Although to be fair, such a move may be rather superfluous at this point, since such stories are now entering into the public domain at a fairly regular clip. The latest of which seen splashed across the pages of the [Los Angeles Times](#).)

Meanwhile, French President Nicolas Sarkozy used the latest "Friends of Syria" summit to

reaffirm his call for the establishment of a “humanitarian corridor” within Syria. Such notions, though, are not limited to a politically damaged French president. [C.N.N.](#) reports that the discussions within the Obama administration about creating a “buffer zone” along the Syrian-Turkey border have “intensified.” At the same time, the [Washington Post](#) editorial board claims—quite naively one must add—that such a zone “could be accomplished with a modest military force and could cause the regime to collapse.”

The impetus for the latest push to establish a “buffer zone” was an alleged cross border attack along the Turkish border by Syrian forces earlier this month. The severity of the purported incident even led Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to threaten to invoke Article 4 of the N.A.T.O. charter, which would see the alliance fully ensnared in the Syrian conflict.

The reporting of the supposed Syrian incursion into Turkey, however, is highly misleading. As Pepe Escobar writes at [Asia Times Online](#), Turkey is actively sheltering members of the Free Syrian Army, which are then staging attacks on Syrian forces across the border. But, those rooting for regime change simply do not trouble themselves with such matters.

Propaganda in service of regime change

It’s no surprise, then, that one encounters the U.S. media peddling propaganda strictly intended to discredit the Annan initiative. For instance, an [Associated Press](#) story this past week on the U.N. observer mission in Syria went as follows:

Gunfire erupted Wednesday as U.N. observers drove through an anti-regime demonstration in a Damascus suburb, sending people ducking for cover and raising questions about the safety of the monitors, according to activists and amateur video posted online.

The videos could not be independently confirmed [emphasis added]. But the Britain-based activist group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Syrian security forces fired at anti-regime protesters in the suburb of Arbeen, wounding eight.

Yet as [Reuters](#) reported, the head of the U.N. observer team, Moroccan Colonel Ahmad Himmiche, stated rather clearly, “We did not come under any fire.”

Another favorite line of the U.S. media is that Syrian government forces have disregarded the ceasefire completely, and continue their shelling. As the [New York Times](#) wrote Friday, “YouTube videos posted from the devastated city of Homs showed flames and intense black smoke after government shelling of a downtown residential neighborhood.”

Such videos, uploaded by anti-government activists, are, needless to say, ripe for distortions and outright fabrications. After all, such fabrications have already been documented by [Britain’s Channel 4 News](#), and can be seen most recently at the [Moon of Alabama](#).

It is noteworthy then, that the first independently confirmed breach of the ceasefire appears to have occurred at the hands of rebel forces. As [McClatchy](#) reported Thursday:

Rebels here [in Qusay, Syria] fought the Syrian military Wednesday in a breach of a U.N.-sponsored cease-fire that was rare primarily because it was witnessed by an independent journalist who’d entered the country surreptitiously earlier this week.

The fighting began in this city near the Lebanese border in the early afternoon after a group from the Free Syrian Army, the name claimed by most of the rebels who've taken up arms against the government of President Bashar Assad, attacked a military convoy near the city.

The majority of Western news outlets, though, adhere to the same lax journalistic standards exhibited in the above *A.P.* piece. Whatever it takes, it seems, to derail the Annan plan.

The limits of N.A.T.O.

All such posturing by the N.A.T.O.-G.C.C. alliance notwithstanding, Assad's grip on power remains firm. And as a result, that long held Western dream of a "quick" regime change in Syrian, a la Libya, has ever so slightly begun to fade. As the [A.P.](#) notes, the Obama administration, once eager to declare Assad's days to be numbers, now refrains from putting any time frame on his demise. And with good cause, one might add.

As Hassan Illeik writes at [al-Akhbar English](#), "These are not revolutionary times in Damascus. The regime is confident of its future and of that of the country." Illeik continues:

On the external front, official confidence has also been bolstered by a variety of factors – though three are particularly important: namely, Russia, China and Iran.

Moscow has come to play a decisive role in the Syrian regime's handling of the crisis. It no longer comes as a surprise to hear a senior Syrian official saying: "We wanted to launch an internal dialogue some weeks ago, but our Russian friends advised us to postpone that step so as not to impede Kofi Annan's mission."

Under the Annan plan, according to the official, the deployment of observers should enable the forces of law and order to reassert control and ensure security for the public. Russia, meanwhile, views Syria as a first line of defense – both of its own strategic security and of its ally Iran.

Indeed, for as Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov has previously [warned](#), even an opposition "armed to the teeth," would not defeat the Syrian army.

Such warnings from Moscow aside, N.A.T.O. alarm over any potential action in Syria has been stoked primarily over its own ineptitude, as was documented in a recent alliance report on its mission in Libya. As the [New York Times](#) reported:

The findings undercut the idea that the intervention was a model operation and that N.A.T.O. could effectively carry out a more complicated campaign in Syria without relying disproportionately on the United States military. Even with the American help in Libya, N.A.T.O. had only about 40 percent of the aircraft needed to intercept electronic communications, a shortage that hindered the operation's effectiveness, the report said.

Such findings left the [Times](#) editorial board to fret that, "N.A.T.O.'s credibility is on the line. And that is a serious problem for Europe and for the United States." Serious indeed; for those threats of "all options being on the table" ring hollow with questions left lingering as to the will and capability of the N.A.T.O. alliance.

All this is not to say that the N.A.T.O.-led “Friends of Syria” shall soon abandon the aspirations for Syrian regime change. (The supply of communications equipment, arms, and cash will likely continue to flow to the armed Syrian opposition for the foreseeable future.) Rather, it is to say that the struggle unfolding in Syria and beyond has now entered a new phase. Unwilling and unable to quickly oust Assad with pure force, the “Friends of Syria” now appear content on seeking to slowly bleed Syria. And in doing so, they hope to shame Russia into eventually turning on its Arab ally. A rather desperate plan, no doubt, but put into play nonetheless.

Of course, rather than ousting Assad and imposing a pliant puppet in his place, the maneuvering of the N.A.T.O.-G.C.C. alliance will likely manage to merely protract the crisis. And this shall ultimately leave the self-proclaimed international friends of the Syrian people prolonging the bloodletting...some “friends.”

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