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Imperialist powers manipulate Syrian peace plan to prepare for war

By Johannes Stern

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In recent days, the Western powers have stepped up efforts to foment civil war in Syria and prepare for imperialist intervention in this strategically important country. Media reports indicate increased fighting between Western-backed armed groups and the Syrian army, accompanied by terrorist attacks on government forces and civilians.

Heavy fighting has taken place in the Aleppo Governorate in northern Syria. The province has a 200-kilometer border with Turkey, where the Western-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) is based. According to the news agency AFP, “rebel” forces attacked military intelligence headquarters in Aleppo, the second largest city in Syria, and the FSA launched a dawn assault on the nearby Minakh Air Base.

In another attack at Hreitan, an officer of the Syrian army and two security personnel were killed early Saturday. In Idlib province, one of the FSA’s main strongholds near the Turkish border, Syrian forces shelled an area held by the FSA.

Clashes and terrorist attacks have also taken place in central Syria. In several districts in the city of Hama, fighting was reported between armed groups and the regular Syrian army. The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported that 5 explosive devices planted by terrorist groups

were dismantled in Homs. Over 100 people have reportedly been killed over the weekend, and thousands have fled over the Turkish border in recent days.

The US and its main NATO allies—France, Great Britain, Germany and Turkey—are leading the campaign to destabilize Syria. Together with the reactionary Persian Gulf monarchies, Saudi-Arabia and Qatar, they are funding and arming the so called “rebels.” During the April 1 “Friends of Syria” meeting in Istanbul, the Saudi and Qatari regimes officially announced they would put the Syrian “rebels” on their payroll, thus formalizing their status as a mercenary force of imperialism’s regional proxies.

The current offensive by the “rebels” and the reactions of their Western backers expose the fraudulent character of the six-point peace plan that former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan negotiated with the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad. The imperialist powers never intended to find a political settlement to the conflict, as they claimed, but sought instead to create a pretext for further provocations against Syria, hoping to organize a Libyan-style overthrow of the regime.

On Friday, UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-moon placed all the blame for the violence in Syria on the Assad regime, declaring that attacks by government forces “violate” the UN Security Council statement demanding an end to hostilities. Ban-Ki-moon declared, “The Syrian authorities remain fully accountable for grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. These must stop at once.” He accused the Syrian government of using the April 10 deadline for implementing a cease-fire as an “excuse” to step up the killing.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that Turkey will wait “patiently” to see if Syria sticks to the ceasefire deadline, but added that it may take “certain steps” if the violence does not stop after that. Erdogan did not specify what measures Turkey would take, but he has in the past announced plans to create a buffer zone inside Syria—that is, to seize a portion of Syria’s territory.

In another sign of increasing imperialist sentiment for war with Syria, the German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published an editorial Thursday entitled “The Lessons of Syria.” Suggesting that the search for a peaceful solution of the Syrian crisis was hopeless, it wrote: “Sometimes the use of military power is not only right, but even morally justified, unlike the search for a ‘political solution’ which does not exist.”

The Syrian regime has repeatedly pointed out the criminal actions of the West. On Friday, it sent letters to the president of the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary General, stating that “the terrorist acts committed by the armed terrorist groups in Syria have increased during the last few days, particularly after reaching an understanding on Kofi Annan's plan.”

According to SANA, Syria’s Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ministry spokesman Dr. Makdessi released a statement on Sunday announcing that “Syria has undertaken steps to show good faith concerning Annan's plan and informed him of them,” adding that Syria has drawn his attention “to the escalation of violence by the armed terrorist groups as it announced agreement to Annan's mission.”

Makdessi criticized interpretations of Annan's speeches at the UN Security Council that maintain that Syria must unilaterally withdraw all troops from its cities on Tuesday, April 10. He stated that this was a false interpretation, especially given that armed "rebel" forces have offered no written guarantees to the Syrian government agreeing to stop their attacks. He also reportedly stressed that Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey had given no pledges to stop funding and arming terrorist groups.

The statement declared that Syria would "continue cooperation with Mr. Annan to implement his plan and will inform him of the undertaken steps in the hope of obtaining the aforementioned guarantees."

In a response to the statement, FSA leader Rifat al-Asaad told Reuters by phone from Turkey that he would not deliver written guarantees. He declared that "the regime will not implement this plan" and that "this plan will fail." He said that his organization does not recognize the Assad-regime, cynically adding that the FSA will silence its weapons only after the Syrian troops have retreated to their barracks and removed all their checkpoints.

Rifat al-Asaad and his mercenaries have virtually no basis of support amongst the Syrian population, but they feel encouraged by their imperialist backers, who have made clear that they intend to remove Assad regardless.

Kofi Annan made no reference to the Syrian demands and declared he was "shocked by recent reports of a surge in violence and atrocities in several towns and villages in Syria," He reminded the Syrian government "of the need for full implementation of its commitments," which can only be understood as a further threat. As UN Secretary General in 2001, Annan himself was one of the main architects of the United Nation's infamous "responsibility to protect" doctrine.

In last year's imperialist war against Libya, calls for "buffer zones" and "humanitarian corridors" were advanced in the name of the "responsibility to protect" civilians. This was used to justify a war that killed tens of thousands and laid waste to entire Libyan cities. An imperialist attack against Syria would threaten the lives of millions. It would be directed not only against Syria, but also against Iran, Syria's sole ally in the region, and ultimately against Russia and China, with the danger of triggering a conflict between the major powers.