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Terrorist attacks intensify after Western war threats against Syria

By Johannes Stern

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Over the weekend the Western-backed opposition in Syria stepped up its attacks on government buildings, military facilities and civilians as it aims to bring down Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and install a pro-Western client regime in Damascus.

Fighting between the Syrian army and Western proxy forces has been intensifying since US President Barack Obama threatened Syria with direct military intervention two weeks ago. Last week French President Hollande, British Foreign Secretary of State William Hague and Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi demanded Assad's fall. Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu also called for a no-fly zone over Syria. However, for the moment decisions to enforce a no-fly zone and launch open warfare against Syria have not been finalized.

The Western powers are still relying on their armed proxy forces inside Syria—like the Turkey-based Free Syrian Army (FSA) and various Sunni Islamist terrorist groups—to fight Assad.

Media reports indicated intense fighting between the Syrian army and anti-Assad forces throughout the weekend. Opposition sources said that armed insurgents had seized an air defense base close to Deir-Ez Zor on Saturday, and that battles were raging near a military airport in the area. Opposition fighters also claimed that they had targeted the regime's air installations near

Aleppo and Idlib in the northern part of Syria close to the Turkish border, and that they had shot down a Syrian fighter jet.

On Saturday a car bomb near the Muaz Bin Jabal mosque in the Sbaineh suburb of Damascus killed 15 civilians. The explosion also reportedly wounded several people and caused damage to buildings in the area. The Sbaineh district is dominated by Palestinian refugees who are mostly reluctant to join the pro-Western opposition against Assad.

The Syrian state-run news agency, SANA, reported that earlier on Saturday another bomb killed Brigadier General Taher Subeir, when he got into his car in front of his home in the Damascus district of Rukn Addien. Since the outbreak of armed struggle in Syria, over 8,000 soldiers and security personnel have been killed by the Western-backed armed opposition.

In Deir ez-Zor, the largest city in eastern Syria, a suicide bomb attack on the pro-government al-Akhbariya TV station killed one person and injured two children.

On Sunday a bomb attack at the Syrian army's General Staff headquarters in the Abu Rummaneh district in central Damascus wounded four officers. Islamist forces in the Free Syrian Army (FSA) took responsibility for the attack. A video statement released by the Grandsons of the Prophet brigade, a section of the FSA, said that "bombs were planted inside the army headquarters" and that "the operation targeted officers in the Assad army who have been planning and giving the go ahead for the massacres against the Syrian people."

The blast was in the same district where an FSA suicide bomber killed four high-ranking Syrian officials—including Defense Minister Dawoud Rajha and his deputy, Assef Shawkat—on August 15, and 55 people in a twin suicide car bombing outside a military intelligence building on May 10.

The FSA said it carried out the bombing as retaliation for an August 25 massacre in the Damascus suburb of Daraya, where more than 300 people were reportedly killed. While the FSA and other opposition groups blame the Syrian regime for the deaths, a report by Robert Fisk, the first Western journalist reporting from Daraya after the massacre, indicates that the FSA itself was involved in the killings.

Another element of the US-backed propaganda campaign is the release of ever-higher casualty figures, which are all blamed on the Syrian government. On Sunday the London-based activist group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said that 5,440 people, including 4,114 civilians were killed in August. The Local Coordination Committees (LCCs), a faction of the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC), put the toll at 4,933 civilians.

Lakhdar Brahimi, the new United Nations (UN) envoy to Syria made clear that the offensive for regime change in Syria will be continued. In an interview with *al-Arabiya* TV he said that "the

need for change is urgent and necessary. The Syrian people must be satisfied and their legitimate demands are met.”

He stated that the Syrian government is primarily responsible for the violence. Calling on both parties to stop the violence, he said that “this call is primarily directed to the government. More than others, it is the duty of governments, under any circumstances and anywhere, not just in Syria, to ensure security and stability for their people.”

Brahimi’s comments are deeply cynical. It is the intensification of the campaign by the US and its allies to oust Assad that is primarily responsible for the humanitarian disaster.

A former colonel of the Syrian army told the *New York Times* that he would not have defected if he had known that he would end up in a refugee camp in Jordan. He said: “We thought the regime would collapse in two months” explaining that now “the Syrians are getting killed in a war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.”

This comment is particularly significant, in that it shows that Syrian refugees—presented in the Western media purely as victims of the Assad regime—view themselves as caught between the Iranian backers of the Assad regime and the reactionary Saudi monarchy, which is backing the anti-Assad forces together with Washington. They do not see the anti-Assad armed opposition as fighting for democracy, but for the strategic interests of the Persian Gulf monarchies.

Washington views regime change in Syria as the next step to deepen its hegemony over the energy-rich and geostrategically crucial Middle East and Central Asian regions. Iran feels increasingly threatened by the US war-drive against Syria and pointed to the danger of a wider regional war in the case of a US attack on its ally.

With cooperation from Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, America has the goal of striking a blow against Syria and making preparations for the fall of the Syrian government,” Mohammad Ali Assoudi, the deputy for culture and propaganda of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), said.

He added, “if America were to attack Syria, Iran along with Syria’s allies will take action, which would amount to a fiasco for America. In the case of American stupidity and a military attack by this country on Syria, the joint military pact [Iran and Syria signed a mutual defense pact in 2006] of Syria’s allies would be implemented.”