

# European powers lift embargo, move to arm Syrian opposition

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On Monday the foreign ministers of the European Union (EU) met in Brussels and agreed not to renew the arms embargo against Syria. This will allow each European country to directly arm the Syrian opposition fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which was previously forbidden under the terms of a one-year EU embargo which is about to expire on Friday.

Europe's former colonial powers in the Middle East, Britain and France, are leading the offensive to directly arm the Syrian rebels.

British foreign secretary William Hague cynically sought to present European plans to arm the rebels as part of a "political solution" to the conflict in Syria. He claimed that, "in the end there is only a political and diplomatically supported solution," adding that amending the EU arms embargo was "part of supporting the diplomatic work."

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius resorted to making bogus charges that Syria has used chemical weapons in order to push for arming the Syrian rebels and pave the way for direct military intervention.

"There is increasingly strong evidence of localized use of chemical weapons," Fabius claimed. "We are consulting with our partners to see what concrete consequences that we are going to draw from this."

US President Barack Obama has repeatedly threatened to treat the use of chemical weapons in Syria as a "red line" or a "game changer" that would trigger an aggressive response.

Hague vowed to seek "common ground" with the other EU member states on arming the Syrian rebels, but indicated that Britain would do it anyway if no agreement is reached. He stressed that, "doing the right thing for Syria" is "more important than whether the EU is able to stick together on every detail of this."

Austria, the Czech Republic, Sweden and Finland

claimed to oppose arming the Syrian rebels. Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger declared: "We just received the Nobel Peace Prize, and to now go in the direction of intentionally getting involved in a conflict with weapon deliveries, I think that is wrong."

Such comments are an example of the utterly cynical character of European imperialism. The war against Syria is precisely showing that Europe is not a power for peace and that last year's awarding of the Nobel peace prize to the European Union was a farce.

In fact, the EU has backed the Syrian opposition from the start, collaborating closely with US, Turkey and the Gulf States who are arming Islamist opposition fighters in Syria to the teeth and stationing Patriot anti-ballistic missile systems near Turkey's border with Syria.

The EU recently lifted its Syrian oil sanctions to help fund the Syrian opposition including al-Qaeda linked rebel groups such as Al Nusra Front that have committed horrific crimes against the Syrian population. (See also: "European powers fund Al Qaeda looting of Syrian oil")

After the wars against Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya—which were partially criticized by some European states—the European powers have lined up behind the war strategy of US imperialism to plunder the vast, resource-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. Like the US, the European powers regard the Alawite-dominated Assad regime in Syria and its main regional ally Shiite Iran as the main obstacles to securing their interests.

Germany is seeking to rally the "dissident" EU member states behind a more aggressive policy against Syria. "Disagreement in the EU, that would be the wrong signal," Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle declared. "The more cohesive Europe acts, the more influence we will have on overcoming the current

violence in Syria.”

According to a report in *Der Spiegel* published the same day, Berlin has decided that Germany’s Federal Intelligence Service (BND) will resume sending so-called “medipacks”—consisting of medical supplies and hundreds of bulletproof vests—to the opposition Free Syrian Army (FSA). Only months ago, the German Foreign Office had forced the BND to stop, *Der Spiegel* wrote.

Turkey and the pro-Western Syrian opposition—the most aggressive forces pushing for direct military intervention in Syria—urged the EU to ease the embargo. “I definitely support the lifting of the arms embargo against the Syrian people,” said the Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who attended the talks in Brussels.

In Istanbul, Khaled al-Saleh, spokesman of Syria’s main opposition National Coalition declared: “It is the moment of truth that we’ve been waiting for for months.”

Without any broader support in the Syrian population, the Sunni Islamist opposition is rapidly losing ground against the Syrian army, which is now supported by fighters of the Lebanese Shia Hezbollah militia. In recent days, the Syrian government has been launching an offensive to recapture the key-strategic town of Qusayr, close to the Lebanese border.

Against this background and the Syrian war spreading to Lebanon and Iraq, the imperialist powers are escalating their intervention in Syria and the entire Middle East. A US delegation consisting of US Secretary of State John Kerry and Senators John McCain and Bob Menendez threatened a Libyan-style intervention on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Jordan last Saturday.

Mc Cain, a member of the US senate armed services and foreign relations committees, told the *Jordan Times*: “We are prepared to take every step to protect the Jordanian regime’s stability, its people and its territory; the provision of Patriot missiles comes under this protection.”

He explained that the missiles’ dispatch may be the “first step” to the establishment of no-fly zone within Syria. “With the use of Patriot missiles we can enforce and sustain a no-fly zone to allow the opposition an opportunity to organize and change the tide of the conflict as we did in Libya,” he said.

Yesterday, McCain reportedly also briefly traveled into Syria from Turkey, accompanied by FSA Supreme Military Council chief General Salem Idris, to meet with 18 opposition militia leaders from across Syria. They reportedly told McCain they wanted increased US support, heavy weapons, and US air strikes in Syria.

Together with the Gulf sheikhdoms of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is one of imperialism’s key strategic allies for its offensive in the region. According to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, a senior Jordanian official close to Jordanian King Abdullah has confirmed that Jordan is allowing Israel to operate unmanned drones over its air space to monitor the situation in Syria.

He also said that, if the need arose, “of course we will allow Israel to use Jordanian air space for another attack on Syria”.

In the past month, Israel already launched three direct strikes on Syria and is preparing a far bigger intervention.

On Monday, Israel staged a massive military drill focusing on coping with chemical weapons. It was part of a week-long nationwide exercise, code-named “Home Front Eitan 1,” preparing the civilian population, the military and emergency services for a war in which large numbers of missiles could hit Israel.



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