

G8 calls for peace talks to provide cover for US war preparations against Syria

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The five-point plan for Syria drawn up for the G8 summit by British Prime Minister David Cameron ended up resembling a clock without a spring.

The 39th summit of the G8 gathered together US President Barack Obama, Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, French President Francois Hollande, Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, European Union President Herman van Rompuy and EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso.

Cameron spent the entire two days seeking to put maximum pressure on Putin to sign up to the removal of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as the precondition for a negotiated settlement of the country's bloody civil war. This would be rejected by the Syrian regime and lead it to boycott a proposed summit in Geneva, which could then be used as the pretext for a full-scale military intervention.

The resolution, it was hoped, would also include denunciations of the use of chemical weapons, including the unproven assertion that Syrian forces had done so. The Obama administration has employed the "big lie" technique, citing Syria's alleged use of such weapons to claim that Assad has crossed a "red line," justifying Washington's decision to begin openly supplying arms to the Syrian opposition.

Russia rejects the assertion that chemical weapons have been used and has demanded to see the evidence on which the US bases its charges. Another proposed point was a commitment to oppose the operations of Al Qaeda-linked elements in Syria, included so as to address concerns that the opposition is dominated by Islamist jihadist forces.

The plan in addition proposed "day one planning" for a transition to a new government with executive authority.

Putin's refusal to accede to these demands frustrated the scheme that had been worked out by Cameron and

Obama, but it will do nothing to halt the preparations for war now underway.

The G8 communiqué calls for peace talks to be held as soon as possible, but does not mention the fate of Assad. Bizarrely, it calls on both the Syrian authorities and the opposition to commit to destroying all organisations affiliated with Al Qaeda.

Prior to the summit, Cameron met with Putin at Number 10 Downing Street, where the Russian premier denounced the US decision to arm the Syrian opposition. A meeting with Obama was no less frosty.

The White House announced Friday evening it would supply arms to the Supreme Military Council of the Syrian opposition, having determined "with a high degree of certainty" that Assad's fighters had used the nerve agent sarin. Before departing for the summit at Lough Erne, Northern Ireland, Obama gave television interviews to conceal the reality that the US will be arming Islamists affiliated to Al Qaeda and others perpetrating a brutal sectarian war in Syria.

Obama rejected comparisons with Iraq without explaining why, insisting instead that "the fact of the matter is that we've got serious interests there [in Syria]... we can't have the situation of ongoing chaos in a major country that borders a country like Jordan, which in turn borders Israel. And we have a legitimate need to be engaged and to be involved."

"We're not taking sides in a religious war between Shia and Sunni," he claimed.

In fact, the US is responsible for deliberately stoking up a sectarian civil war, and is now using the death and chaos it has caused as a pretext for intervening militarily.

Making an explicit criticism of Moscow, Obama added, "Assad, at this point—in part because of his support from Iran and from Russia—believes that he does not have to engage in a political transition, believes that he can continue to simply violently suppress over half of the

population.”

The US president could not explain how Assad is to engage in a political transition when he is to be excluded from it.

Obama and Putin met for an hour Monday, their first face-to-face talks in a year, and held a press conference afterwards. “Of course, our opinions don’t coincide,” said Putin, while Obama noted that he and Putin had “differing perspectives” on Syria.

That evening, Cameron organised a private dinner attended by heads of government only, supposedly to allow everyone to speak freely. However, the atmosphere was doubtless clouded by revelations from the US National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden that Britain systematically spies on all those attending such conferences.

Cameron had threatened that unless Putin signed up to his five-point plan, the other seven members of the G8 would issue their own statement. But Russian officials made clear there would be no substantive agreement.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said earlier that Russia had refused to accept any mention of Assad’s fate in the communiqué. “This would be not just unacceptable for the Russian side, but we are convinced that it would be utterly wrong, harmful and would completely upset the political balance,” he said.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, speaking in Kuwait, said, “We are categorically against... assertions that the conference should be some kind of public act of capitulation by the [Syrian] government delegation followed by a handing over of power to the opposition.”

In an indication of how explosive the tensions became, Hollande stated publicly, “How can we allow that Russia continues to deliver arms to the Assad regime when the opposition receives very few—and is being massacred?”

After one final unscheduled session addressing Syria on Tuesday, on the pretext of discussing counter-terrorism, the watered-down final communiqué was released. Russia and the US have thus formally agreed to “peace” negotiations in Geneva next month, though most commentators said they now expect there will be no meeting until at least August.

The *Guardian* cited British sources as saying Putin privately had said he had no personal allegiance to Assad and would accept a transitional government without him, as long as there was no power vacuum and the new government included trusted representatives of the present regime and its military. Whatever Putin said or did not say, this is a tacit call for a coup to depose Assad while

preserving the Ba’athist regime.

Regardless of what occurs next on the diplomatic front, things will proceed apace in the military arena. Washington will engage in a discussion about what type of arms and other measures are required to “shift the balance” in favour of Assad’s opponents.

Obama will portray arms shipments in the most anodyne terms—small arms that are “no match” for the Syrian army’s advanced weaponry, even as France colludes with Saudi Arabia to supply the so-called “rebels” with anti-aircraft surface-to-air Mistral-class MANPADS, as well as anti-tank weapons.

Obama will in addition continue to publicly query the effectiveness of a no-fly zone, even as one is being actively prepared.

The US is already studying setting up a no-fly zone in Syria, close to the southern border with Jordan, according to two senior Western diplomats in Turkey and a third regional diplomat. On Saturday, the US confirmed that Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel had approved a Jordanian request that F-16 fighters and Patriot missiles remain in the country after a joint military exercise this week. Batteries of Patriot missiles have already been stationed on the Turkish border.

For their part, the Cameron and Hollande governments will begin their own discussions on whether the UK and France will join the US in openly supplying weaponry to the opposition.

War against Syria is opposed by the vast majority of working people in the US and Europe. Fully 70 percent of Americans oppose arming the opposition, according to Pew Research, while in the UK only 17 percent support the US initiative. But war will continue to be planned behind closed doors so that the major powers can divide the oil riches of the Middle East between them.



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