

US-NATO campaign to justify Syria war disintegrates as attack looms

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Washington's campaign to justify war against Syria is disintegrating, as it becomes ever clearer that the war is illegal, and that Washington has no evidence to back up charges that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime used chemical weapons in Ghouta. Despite press reports of an imminent US-NATO attack, US and British officials suggested yesterday that they might delay launching the war.

There is rising concern inside the political establishment about how to package a war in Syria modeled on the hated 2003 invasion of Iraq. Again, Washington and London are moving to launch a war based on lies about weapons of mass destruction and without legal sanction from the UN Security Council—that is, in violation of international law.

Even before war has begun, Obama administration officials are in disarray. In a PBS television interview last night, Obama attempted to back away from threats of an imminent attack: "We have not yet made a decision, but the international norm against the use of chemical weapons needs to be kept in place. If we are saying this in a clear and decisive but very limited way, we send a shot across the bow saying, stop doing this; that can have a positive impact on our national security over the long term."

Obama's claim that his administration has not decided to move against Assad is an absurd lie. Washington has called for Assad's overthrow for over a year, while the CIA massively armed Al Qaeda-linked Islamist opposition militias against his regime.

A senior US official contradicted Obama yesterday, telling NBC that US moves toward intervention in Syria are "past the point of no return," and that strikes will be launched in days.

Obama is also encountering opposition to his attempt to launch a war without a vote in Congress, in violation

of the US Constitution. A petition signed by 111 House lawmakers, 94 Republicans and 17 Democrats, warns that this would "violate the separation of powers." The petition asks that Congress be reconvened so it can back the war and "share the burden of decisions made regarding US involvement in the quickly escalating Syrian conflict."

Yesterday the British Conservative-Liberal Democrat government retreated from its intention to take a vote today supporting war with Syria. With public support for war hovering in polls between six and nine percent and predictions of mass anti-war protests, as well as disagreements within the military and even the government, the opposition Labour Party declared that it would not support direct action by UK forces without a further vote in the Commons.

To provide a fig-leaf for its support for war, Labour insisted that the United Nations Security Council must be allowed to consider a report from weapons inspectors charged with investigating the alleged chemical weapons attack and that "every effort should be made to secure a Security Council Resolution backing military action before any such action is taken."

The UN has said that it will be at least four days before inspectors are able to finish their work in Syria.

The motion will now leave the door open for intervention, asking MPs to agree the principle that a "strong humanitarian response" is required from the international community that "may, if necessary, require military action that is legal, proportionate and focused on saving lives by preventing and deterring further use of Syria's chemical weapons"

The fact that the US and Britain embarked on such reckless and unpopular policies—first arming Islamist opposition militias against Assad, then moving to

illegally attack Syria—testifies to the fact that they are indifferent to public opinion. With their repeated, inflammatory statements, Obama and Cameron have staked their political authority on this war. They will seek at all costs to proceed with it, despite its unpopularity and rising international pressure.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov charged this week that Washington had no proof to back up its allegations that Assad's forces gassed Syrian civilians in Ghouta. "They cannot produce evidence, but keep on saying that the 'red line' has been crossed and they cannot wait any longer," he said, pointing out that "the use of force without the sanction of the UN Security Council is a crude violation of international law."

Concerned that the Obama administration is undermining the credibility of the UN by pressing for war before inspectors have even investigated Ghouta, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon pleaded yesterday: "The team needs time to do its job. Give peace a chance; give diplomacy a chance, stop fighting and start talking."

Obama administration officials have told the UN to call off the inspectors, however. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the administration told Ban that UN inspectors' efforts in Syria were "pointless." CNN reported Wednesday that "US officials are all but telling United Nations inspectors in Syria to get out of the way."

Washington clearly does not want the truth about what happened in Ghouta to come out. The chemical weapons incident itself could have been manufactured by US intelligence, in an operation aiming to provide the pretext for war. Since the middle of this month, the areas near the chemical incident have been flooded with CIA-trained militants led by US, Israeli, and Jordanian commandos.

Previous UN investigations found the US-backed rebels responsible for other chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

State and media propaganda maintains that US attack plans are a limited response to violations of international law by Assad. These claims, dutifully disseminated by a state-controlled media, are lies intended to disorient the public. The objective of the planned US strikes is to kill Assad and cripple his military, thus changing the balance of power inside Syria between the Assad regime and US-backed

Islamist opposition militias.

The US offensive is based on a carefully prepared plan to destroy the Syrian regime's military capability. According to CNN, "there is no indication that the missiles would target stockpiles of chemical weapons." In fact, strikes against "military command bunkers" and airfields are being planned.

The US is moving significant forces into the region, including at least one nuclear submarine and four destroyers in the Mediterranean, and two aircraft carriers in the western Indian Ocean. Together with the British build-up of fighter-bombers and military equipment on nearby Cyprus, these deployments make clear that claims in the media that the Syrian war would be a limited pinprick operation are lies. The US and its allies are preparing devastating attacks that will kill thousands and savage Syria's infrastructure.

The offensive by the US and its allies threatens to unleash a far broader regional and even global war. US hawks and military planners have pushed for war and "regime change" against Syria for a decade, aiming to clear the way for an attack on US imperialism's main regional target, Iran, and set the stage for a US confrontation with Russia and China.

Iran has responded to the war threats by warning that attacks will be launched against Israel in retaliation. Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Araqchi said: "We want to strongly warn against any military attack in Syria. There will definitely be perilous consequences for the region. These complications and consequences will not be restricted to Syria. It will engulf the whole region."

On Wednesday, apparently in response to the statements from Iran, Israel mobilized reservists and bolstered its missile defenses.



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