

British parliament votes down Syria action as US presses ahead with strike plans

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In a stunning setback for the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government of Prime Minister David Cameron and the Obama administration in the US, Britain's MPs voted down a government attempt to secure agreement in principle for military intervention in Syria.

Cameron is deeply wounded, his future as Conservative Party leader uncertain. As for the Obama administration and its European allies, their war drive against Syria has been discredited and exposed as a criminal conspiracy hatched in the recesses of the CIA, MI5, Mossad, and other intelligence agencies. They seized upon a chemical attack in Ghouta most likely carried out by the US-backed insurgents themselves as a *casus belli*—the opportunity to activate a plan for regime change in Syria aimed at isolating Iran and securing US hegemony over the oil riches of the Middle East.

The White House indicated Thursday that it was planning to push ahead with a bombing campaign regardless. The *New York Times* reported Thursday night that “administration officials made clear that the eroding support would not deter Mr. Obama in deciding to go ahead with a strike... all indications suggest that a strike could occur soon after United Nations investigators charged with scrutinizing the Aug. 21 attack leave the country. They are scheduled to depart Damascus on Saturday.”

National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden said, “President Obama’s decision-making will be guided by what is in the best interests of the United States. He believes that there are core interests at stake for the United States and that countries who violate international norms regarding chemical weapons need to be held accountable.”

The US military has moved a fifth destroyer to the Mediterranean Sea, equipped with cruise missiles that would be used in any attack on Syria.

Should the US push ahead with the war in defiance of the vote in parliament and of overwhelming popular opposition in Britain, the United States, and internationally, it would be the most brazen act of international gangsterism since the epoch of Hitler.

Military strikes could quickly lead to a regional and even global conflict. Iran has threatened to respond by attacking Israel, and on Wednesday Russia sent its own warships to the Mediterranean Sea.

Already on Wednesday, the Cameron government had been forced to retreat from its plan to make yesterday’s recalled vote in parliament an explicit sanctioning of military action. The opposition Labour Party had decided to refuse to back a military assault before the United Nations Security Council had heard back from chemical weapon inspectors in Syria and been allowed to vote on their findings. There were also signs of a mounting backbench rebellion by Conservatives.

Cameron recalled parliament yesterday, as the UN Security Council met to vote on a UK resolution “authorising all necessary measures to protect civilians” in Syria, with the intention of placing maximum pressure on Russia and China—or at least contrasting a positive vote for intervention by parliament with their having blocked any UN action. In the event, neither Britain’s UN Security Council resolution nor the parliamentary vote went in Cameron’s favor.

Throughout the day, there was a growing mood of panic in the Cameron government, as it became clear that they had no evidence to substantiate British and US government claims that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was responsible for a poison gas attack in Ghouta.

Cameron was left floundering, seeking to justify his war plans. While claiming, for example, that it was “beyond doubt” that the Assad regime was guilty of the chemical attack in Damascus, he said in the next breath that “there is no 100 percent certainty about who is responsible.”

Ultimately, the government lost by 285 votes to 272. An amendment moved by Labour placing a number of conditions to be met before any military intervention was defeated, 332 votes to 220, but in the end it was a Conservative revolt that defeated the government.

Significantly, Labour leader Ed Miliband asked for an assurance that Cameron would not use the royal prerogative

to start military intervention without parliamentary approval. A shaken Cameron replied, “I can give that assurance... it is clear to me that the British parliament, reflecting the views of the British people, does not want to see British military action.”

Labour did the bare minimum that could have been expected of a bourgeois opposition party under such circumstances, urging the government to abide by international protocols and wait for the results of a UN investigation. Miliband even described his amendment as a “roadmap” to help make a decision on war, making clear Labour would support military intervention if its conditions were met—including in the event of divisions on the UN Security Council.

The response from the government was nevertheless vicious. Downing Street declared that the Labour leader was giving “succor” to the Assad regime. An unnamed adviser described Miliband in Murdoch’s *Times* with the crudest expletives.

Such language speaks to the fascistic character of the government’s personnel, which are recruited from a criminal political underworld seeking to plunge the world into wars of colonial conquest.

The Cameron government clearly anticipated initially that it could serve as a loyal toady of the Obama administration. However, it badly miscalculated in underestimating the scale of public opposition to war.

The action by Labour and leading Conservatives, headed by former Cameron challenger, David Davies, to vote against Cameron expresses deep divisions within the ruling class over the Syria operation. Above all else, the plans for war against Syria still lie under the long shadow cast by the 2003 war against Iraq. Opinion polls show estimates ranging from just six to 11 percent in support of missile strikes on Syria. With the toxic political legacy of Iraq hanging over them like the sword of Damocles, both Labour and the Conservative rebels were unable to sign off on military action on the basis of yet another transparent concoction of lies.

There was also concern, even among the Conservatives, over the implications of starting a war in Syria, which would quite likely spreading throughout the entire Middle East, without any popular support.

Interventions have been made by leading retired diplomatic, political and military figures, including General Lord Richard Dannatt, the former head of the British Army and Cameron’s former military adviser. Speaking in the House of Lords yesterday, Dannatt said British service personnel should not be forced to fight a war without public support.

Dissident Conservatives were far from enthusiasts of the

UN, but some warned against alienating Russia and China. Most warned against supporting a war based on unsubstantiated allegations that the Assad regime was responsible for the chemical weapons attack in Damascus.

Underlying such concerns are deeper fears that war against Syria would end by bringing to power Islamic fundamentalists affiliated with Al Qaeda—as was the outcome in Libya—and would destabilize the entire Middle East.

Several MPs drew a direct analogy with events leading up to the First World War. A letter to British MPs sent by Jihad Allaham, Speaker of the Syrian People’s Assembly, made a direct appeal on this basis. Denying responsibility for the Damascus attack, it warned against “an aggressive and unprovoked act of war,” adding: “By attacking and weakening Syrian targets and institutions, you would automatically strengthen our common enemy, Al Qaida and its affiliates.”

Invoking the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, which became the spark for World War I, Allaham warned: “Local tragedies become regional wars that explode into global conflict...”

The case for supporting war was made more, not less, difficult by the efforts of Britain’s Joint Intelligence Committee and the legal advice of Attorney General Dominic Grieve, both of which echoed the lies used to justify the Iraq war.

The JIC’s brief concluded that it was “highly likely” that Assad’s regime was responsible for the chemical weapon attack. However, it cited only “open source” evidence such as video footage, the provenance of which is disputed, and the claim that the opposition does not have the capability to launch such an attack. Grieve’s advice simply asserted that, based on a “responsibility to protect”, Britain could participate in military action without UN authorisation.



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