

French President Hollande backs US war against Syria

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The day after the British parliament voted against military action in Syria, French President François Hollande of the Socialist Party (PS) pledged continuing support for the US war drive against Syria, a former French colony. Speaking to *Le Monde* Friday, he robotically recited the lies concocted to justify the war drive, though they have been shattered by British Prime Minister David Cameron's humiliating defeat.

Cameron admitted that there was no "100 percent certainty" about who carried out an alleged chemical attack in Ghouta—which Washington, London, and Paris have tried to blame on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to justify intervening in Syria in support of their Islamist proxy forces. Amid panic in the Cameron regime over popular opposition and discussion of the risk of a global war with Syria's allies, Iran and Russia, the motion for war went down to defeat.

As the Obama administration barrels ahead with its war plans, Hollande is seeking to rally international support for Washington's criminal aggression. If US moves to war based on publicly discredited lies, it is an act of international gangsterism unprecedented since the epoch of Hitler, and the French ruling class' support for it is an act of cowardly self-interest unprecedented since Hollande's political mentor, François Mitterrand, wore the uniform of the fascist Vichy regime that collaborated with Hitler.

Speaking to *Le Monde*, Hollande blithely dismissed the significance of the British parliament's vote: "Each country is sovereign and can decide whether or not to participate in an operation. This is true both for the United Kingdom and for France."

Hollande asserted that "France has a collection of evidence that tend to suggest the regime is responsible," claiming that the US-backed "opposition does not control any such weapons, and all the stocks

are controlled by Bashar al-Assad."

These are brazen lies. Cameron's defeat made clear that neither London nor its allies have any evidence to back up their charges against Assad. As for claims that the US-backed opposition does not have chemical weapons, they have been refuted by findings of UN officials in Syria and by Turkish security forces, who found sarin gas in the homes of Syrian opposition fighters in Adana, Turkey in May.

In utter bad faith, Hollande attempted to downplay the military action that Washington and Paris are about to unleash, aware of broad popular hostility to yet another war. After France's invasion of Mali in January and its leading role in the drive to war in Libya in 2011, a recent poll found 59 percent opposition in France to attacking Syria.

Though he is on the verge of ordering missile strikes and starting a war with Syria, Hollande fatuously told *Le Monde*: "I will make sure that the international community's response halts the spiral of violence."

He declared that given the character of the operation, "I would not speak of war," then a few sentences later threatened that "all options are on the table" to attack Syria.

A French guided missile destroyer and a helicopter carrier left the Mediterranean port of Toulon yesterday, headed east towards Syria, while French warplanes from airbases in France and in the United Arab Emirates are preparing for strikes on Syria.

Hollande has scheduled an extraordinary joint session of the National Assembly and the Senate for Wednesday. Under the terms of France's 1958 constitution, however, this session is purely consultative: the president retains full power to decide to go to war and only has the obligation to "inform" the parliament of his decision. The parliament's only

effective authority comes from the stipulation that it must approve any war lasting longer than four months.

France's support for a US war drive abandoned even by Britain, traditionally considered to be Washington's closest ally, is a stunning reversal, indicating the profound intensification of class conflict in France and in Europe over the last decade.

In 2003, conservative French President Jacques Chirac refused to join the US invasion of Iraq launched, like today's war against Syria, based on lies about alleged weapons of mass destruction. By contributing British forces to the invasion, Prime Minister Tony Blair deservedly earned the contempt of the public and the reputation of being Washington's poodle.

When the British bourgeoisie momentarily stepped away from its appointed role on Thursday, however, Hollande's Socialist Party (PS) immediately moved in as a substitute—with the support of substantial sections of the Gaullist conservatives. They are staking everything on a reckless war that threatens to escalate into a regional and even global military conflict.

This implicates not only the PS, France's bourgeois "left" party of rule, but also its various Stalinist and pseudo-left satellites, such as the French Communist Party and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). Not only did they enthusiastically support Hollande in last year's presidential elections; they themselves promoted imperialism's proxy forces in Syria—the reactionary Islamist opposition militias—as revolutionaries. (See also: "Gilbert Achcar seeks to cover up his support for Middle East wars")

Under conditions where these reactionary forces suppressed opposition in the working class to French imperialism, the principal beneficiary has been the neo-fascist National Front of Marine Le Pen, who has been able to pose as the ruling elite's sole opponent. In a recent press release, she criticizes Hollande's Syrian war plans for benefitting Islamist forces—thus promoting her party's toxic Islamophobia while falsely posturing as a populist opponent of war.

The alignment of virtually the entire political establishment behind a disastrous war in the Middle East and the rise of neo-fascism underscore that wars are not a matter of a false policy of one or another bourgeois politician. It reflects the movement of powerful class forces and the emergence of a revolutionary crisis in which the working class finds

itself in a fundamental and irresolvable conflict with all the institutions of the ruling elite.

The politics of the entire capitalist class, and of the pseudo-left sections of the affluent middle class closest to it, have shifted far to the right. They now see imperialist wars of plunder as key guarantors of their social position.

This underlay the support of the French bourgeoisie and of forces like the NPA for the Libyan war in 2011, during which Libya's oil fields were seized and the international banks grabbed tens of billions in Libyan oil earnings.

The ruling elite also sees war as a useful distraction from profound socio-economic problems for which they have no solution. As Economist Jean-Paul Fitoussi recently told *Libération*, "Europe is plunging into an endless downward spiral, with explosive levels of unemployment in Greece, Spain, and even Italy. Can democracy survive when 60 percent of youth are jobless? The probability of a social explosion is increasing each month."



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