

US Congress to debate and vote on Syria war

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President Obama's announcement Saturday that he would seek congressional authorization for military strikes against Syria sets the stage for a two-week campaign of media propaganda and political intimidation. Its goal is to browbeat the American people into accepting yet another imperialist war in the Middle East.

Obama's announcement was an abrupt reversal, after a week in which US officials suggested that a unilateral American attack on Syria was imminent, using the pretext of an alleged chemical weapons attack August 21 in the suburbs of Damascus.

The announcement incorporated what Obama described as two separate decisions: to "take military action against Syrian regime targets," and to seek authorization for such action beforehand from Congress.

Obama's language was carefully constructed to allow maximum flexibility in escalating the military action. "Syrian regime targets" is specifically not limited to the Syrian military, but includes the political leadership, up to and including President Bashar al-Assad, who is likely to be targeted by US drones, already active in Syrian airspace, as well as cruise missiles.

As for going to Congress, Obama made it explicit that, in his view, he was not bound to abide by the results of a congressional vote. He could launch missiles strikes and bombing raids even if Congress rejects the measure. He also acknowledged that the attack on Syria would not be authorized by the United Nations.

In other words, while disguising his intentions in the language of restraint—noting that in addition to being commander-in-chief, he is "president of the world's oldest constitutional democracy"—Obama is asserting essentially unchecked power to attack any nation, at any time, regardless of either US or international law.

No evidence has been offered to support the US claim

that Syrian President Assad ordered the attack, while credible reports now suggest that the Syrian rebels are responsible.

Russian President Vladimir Putin flatly asserted Saturday that US-backed opposition forces staged the atrocity to bring about a US attack. "I am convinced that it is nothing more than a provocation by those who want to drag other countries into the Syrian conflict," he said.

Even if the Assad regime carried out a chemical weapons attack, the US government has no authority under international law to act as judge, jury and executioner. Washington is itself the leading user of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons like white phosphorus bombs and depleted uranium shells, which have killed thousands in Iraq and are causing a catastrophic level of birth defects.

In multiple appearances on television interview programs Sunday, US Secretary of State John Kerry refused to reply to Putin's criticism of the US pretext for war in Syria. His compliant media interviewers never pressed him over the likelihood that the US-backed "rebels," not Assad, were the likely perpetrators of attacks using poison gas.

There is no democratic content to the official debate over going to war against Syria. The entire Congress—Democratic and Republican, House and Senate—is a political instrument of the US financial aristocracy. Every member accepts the basic premise that the US government has the right to invade any country it chooses, without any regard to national sovereignty or international law.

Obama himself claims that he retains the power to order an attack on Syria even if Congress votes against it. Administration spokesmen and congressional Democrats cited the precedent of the Kosovo War in 1999. At that time, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives voted against a resolution to authorize

US air strikes, but the Clinton administration ignored the vote and continued the bombing.

The corporate-controlled media echoes administration lies about chemical weapons even more shamelessly than eleven years ago, when the Bush administration launched a similar campaign on “weapons of mass destruction” to prepare for the invasion and conquest of Iraq.

Key Democratic congressional leaders have announced their support for war with Syria, even before the official debate begins on September 9. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid issued a statement backing “the limited use of American military force” in Syria. Senator Robert Menendez, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Majority Whip Dick Durbin and Senator Charles Schumer have all indicated their support.

In the House, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi gave her support for a US strike on Syria last Thursday, after a conference call between Obama administration officials and 26 top congressmen and senators. “It is clear that the American people are weary of war,” she said. “However, Assad gassing his own people is an issue of our national security, regional stability and global security.”

Congressional Republicans were divided in their expressions of support or opposition, with many declining to comment until the administration communicates its actual battle plan for the attack. The top four House Republican leaders issued a joint statement Saturday praising Obama for going to Congress for support, but taking no position on the substance of the issue.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers, a leading witch-hunter of Edward Snowden and other whistleblowers who have exposed illegal government surveillance and war crimes, called for approval of the resolution for war with Syria, warning that a vote “denying the President authority to respond with military force” would undermine the world position of the United States.

The calculations behind Obama’s reversal of course and decision to seek congressional authorization are suggested in a front-page analysis in the *New York Times*, pointing to Obama’s preparation for several unpopular, large-scale wars in the Middle East. It quotes an unnamed aide who was present at the

meeting Friday night at the White House where Obama announced his decision.

“He had several reasons, he told them, including a sense of isolation after the terrible setback in the British Parliament. But the most compelling one may have been that acting alone would undercut him if in the next three years he needed Congressional authority for his next military confrontation in the Middle East, perhaps with Iran.

“If he made the decision to strike Syria without Congress now, he said, would he get Congress when he really needed it?”

There are already reports that the British government will seek a second vote in Parliament if the US Congress votes to authorize attacks on Syria. “It opens a very important new opportunity,” Malcolm Rifkind, chairman of the parliamentary intelligence committee and a former defense secretary, told the BBC.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports intensive contingency planning between the US, Turkey, Jordan and the Syrian rebels on a possible collapse of the Assad regime within 24 hours of air strikes, suggesting that the attack will be far more intense and far-reaching than the one currently suggested by the White House.



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