

# Senior political figures demand second vote in UK parliament on Syrian attack

Julie Hyland  
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A concerted campaign is underway for a second vote in Britain's parliament to sanction war against Syria.

These efforts come in the wake of President Obama's announcement that he will seek congressional authorisation for military strikes.

This cynical political manoeuvre was forced on Washington by last Thursday's defeat in the UK parliament of a government motion approving military intervention.

The vote dramatically exposed the absence of credible evidence backing British and American claims that the Assad regime was responsible for the chemical attack on Ghouta—the basis on which they intended to legitimise their long-standing goal of regime change in Syria.

This meant that, faced with mass public opposition and divisions within the ruling elite over the timing and planning of the proposed intervention, the Cameron-led government lost by 13 votes.

Backed by an intensive media and political campaign of lies and misinformation, Obama hopes that his own decision to seek congressional authorisation will provide the much-needed political cover to go to war in defiance of overwhelming anti-war sentiment in the US population.

Likewise, senior figures from all the official parties in Britain regard Obama's announcement as an opportunity to rerun Thursday's vote and get the result they intended.

Asked whether Obama had "reopened the question [of war] for parliamentary approval," former Conservative Party leader Lord Michael Howard replied, "Well I hope so, because I think Parliament, or at least the Opposition in Parliament last week got itself into something of a muddle."

His comment underscores the absence of any genuine

democratic constituency within the bourgeoisie. On the one occasion that parliament accidentally came anywhere near to a vote in line with the wishes of the mass of the population, this is treated as a catastrophe that must be overturned immediately.

In the *Telegraph*, Conservative London mayor Boris Johnson, stated that Obama's delayed attack on Syria "is good for Britain—and the PM [David Cameron]."

Johnson airily dismissed the fact that the US itself "used defoliants and napalm in Vietnam" and the "plenty of seemingly authoritative reports on the web—mainly emanating from Russia or Iran—that suggest the chemicals were in fact in the possession of the rebels, or had been supplied by the Saudis."

The delay would enable the "more difficult question" to be clarified of what the US-led strike was meant to achieve. "Is this a slap on the wrist, or six of the best? Or is it regime change?" he asked.

"If there is new and better evidence that inculcates Assad, I see no reason why the Government should not lay a new motion before Parliament, inviting British participation", he wrote.

Writing in Rupert Murdoch's *Times*, former Conservative defence secretary and chairman of the parliamentary intelligence committee Sir Malcolm Rifkind made clear that Labour leader Ed Miliband had the responsibility to bring such a motion forward.

Labour had tabled an amendment to last Thursday's government motion calling for United Nations weapons inspectors to be given time to report back before Britain could join in a military assault.

Its purpose, as with Obama's latest move, was to provide an illegal war with the appearance of legitimacy. The move backfired, however, because although Labour's amendment was defeated, it exposed divisions—particularly in the Conservative

Party—that led to the fall of the government motion.

Rifkind expressed his sympathy with Miliband's efforts to distance his party from "the shadow of Tony Blair and the irresponsible rush to war in Iraq by Mr. Blair and George W. Bush."

But the Labour leader had a "very special obligation over the next few days", he continued. While a number of those who defeated the government motion were opposed to war against Syria, this was not the case with Miliband, Rifkind said, who had "emphasise[d] several times in his speech that he and the Labour Party were not necessarily against military intervention as proposed by the Prime Minister," including "without the express approval of the Security Council."

Now that the timing of an attack had changed, he went on, Miliband and Cameron "should meet privately and discuss whether there is now sufficient common ground that would allow them to agree a common British policy together with our international allies."

"It would not be easy for either of them, but the national interest and the need to restore Britain's international reputation must take precedence."

Separately, former Liberal Democrat leader Lord Paddy Ashdown called on Miliband to hold a debate on the so-called evidence against the Syrian regime produced by Secretary of State John Kerry on Friday. Parliament could "think again...in light of new developments," Ashdown said.

Publicly, the government has ruled out putting a new motion. A spokesperson for Cameron said that the "government has absolutely no plans to go back to parliament".

Foreign Secretary William Hague had also said that he did not believe there was an "immediate possibility" of rerunning the vote. But he hinted that military intervention could be back on the table, provided the Labour leadership played "a less partisan and less opportunistic role and be prepared to take yes for an answer in terms of the motions that we present to the House of Commons."

Interviewed on Channel 5 on Friday, Miliband admitted that Labour's amendment was not intended to rule out British involvement altogether but to establish the basis on which it could take place.

*Telegraph* columnist and Blair supporter Dan Hodges, who announced he was resigning from Labour in response to the vote, said Cameron should "call Ed

Miliband's bluff."

Noting the Labour leader's comment immediately after the vote that "we must not abandon the Syrian people", Hodges said Cameron should announce a timetable for parliament to "finally give a definitive view on military action" and put Miliband "to the test."

Labour has responded pathetically out of fear that it has inadvertently upset the only constituency that really matters to it—multibillionaire oligarchs such as Rupert Murdoch.

Such is the clamour now going up amongst its ranks for a second vote that the *Guardian*'s Andrew Sparrow wrote in his parliamentary blog, "we have now got to the point where Labour are sounding more interventionist" than the Tories.

Labour's defence secretary, Jim Murphy, has said if there were "really significant developments in Syria...of course the Prime Minister has the right to bring that back to Parliament."

Former Labour culture secretary Ben Bradshaw said Cameron should "accept our amendment and let's come back and do it".

In parliament yesterday, Labour's business secretary, Chuka Umunna, stated, "If in light of changing circumstances, the Prime Minister chooses to come back to parliament, then as a responsible opposition we must consider that."



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