

French parliament debates war against Syria

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France's Senate and National Assembly held a joint session on Wednesday, led by Socialist Party (PS) Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, to debate plans for a US-led war against Syria. The legislators did not vote on war after the debate, which was purely consultative, as the French president has the power to go to war without legislative approval.

It remains unclear whether the French parliament will be recalled to vote on war in Syria, as in Britain and the United States.

Even in the narrow setting of a 90-minute parliamentary debate between legislators who all support France's role in the two-year proxy war in Syria, the crying contradictions in Paris' brief for war rapidly emerged. Though it depicts the war as a few strikes to "punish" alleged chemical attacks, Paris is signing on as a junior partner in a large-scale US-led war based on lies and launched in violation of international law and public opinion. Fully 64 percent of the population opposes a French attack on Syria, a former French colony.

Opening the debate, Ayrault declared: "The action we are considering is well thought-out and collective. It must be firm and proportional, continuing, with significant and targeted objectives. There is no question of having boots on the ground. We want [Syrian President Bashar] Assad to leave, as he does not hesitate to directly threaten France."

Promising to brief legislators on further developments in the drive to war, he added: "In any case, the ultimate decision can be taken only when a coalition is constituted."

The Ayrault government's marketing of the war as a limited exercise to enforce a ban on the use of chemical weapons is utterly fraudulent. It is planning "continuing" and massive air strikes, whose goal is regime-change in Syria. If it is waiting to start the war until after the upcoming vote in the US Congress, it is

because this war is beyond the French military's capabilities. Only the Pentagon commands the level of firepower that is to be unleashed on the Syrian people.

Popular opposition to war internationally has staggered the French political establishment, particularly after British Prime Minister David Cameron's failure to pass a resolution for war in Parliament and US President Barack Obama's about-face on holding a vote in Congress. As a result, both the conservative opposition and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF)-led Left Front have raised tactical criticisms of the PS' war policy.

Christian Jacob, a close associate of Union for a Popular Majority (UMP) leader Jean-François Copé, called for a UN mandate and a parliamentary vote on war, complaining that France is in "a diplomatic and military impasse." This is a sudden reversal in the UMP's position: Copé himself said on August 28 that plans for "continuing" strikes on Syria were "correct in both form and content."

Jacob also echoed Copé's complaints that France is trailing Washington, saying: "It is not France's role to wait for a vote in the US Congress with its arms crossed."

Jean-Louis Borloo of the smaller Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI), who attended intelligence briefings about the alleged Syrian chemical weapons attacks, said: "Can we consider an intervention without proof? No! You have conviction, but you do not have irrefutable proof."

Borloo's comment shows that Paris has no evidence to back up its accusations against the Syrian regime and is preparing to launch an illegal war on the basis of lies. However, Borloo continued by suggesting that it might be possible to obtain a UN mandate for such a war, organizing a vote in the UN General Assembly and bypassing the UN Security Council, where Syria's allies Russia and China have veto power.

PCF deputy André Chassaigne spoke for the Left Front, cloaking the PS' war policy with all the cynicism and deceit of French Stalinism. Chassaigne called on the PS and President François Hollande to take into account "the urgent humanitarian situation and alternative options" in Syria.

Chassaigne made clear that he did not oppose intervention, stating: "Of course, France has the responsibility to act. But only in the interests of the peoples! The chaos of war is not in the interest of the peoples. It is in that of the jihadists."

He added, "Our attachment to peace does not make us renounce our sense of responsibility. This is how our solidarity with the Syrian people finds expression... Our 'responsibility to protect civilian populations,' our solidarity towards the Syrian people must first lead to a significant reinforcement of humanitarian aid."

Chassaigne's pretense of opposition to jihadism, violence and military intervention is a fraud, designed to hide the PCF's support for Paris' intervention in the war in Syria. French imperialism and the PCF specifically have politically supported the arming of jihadist militias in Syria, under the cover of "humanitarian" assistance against the Syrian army.

The PCF has close connections to the imperialist-backed jihadists in Syria via Michel Kilo, a Syrian Stalinist who lives in Paris and is regularly interviewed and praised in the pages of *L'Humanité*, the PCF daily, as Syria's "historical oppositionist." Kilo developed close ties to the Al Nusra Front, an Al Qaeda-linked militia funded by France's Arab allies and whose death squads rule over much of northeastern Syria.

In a February interview on France24, he called for greater support for Al Nusra. "Quit misleading people by frightening them with talk about extremists," he said. "I went to Syria. I met the members of the Al Nusra Front and the Brigade of Free Syrian Men, that you call fundamentalists. But I am Christian and they held me in their arms, they hugged me, and they covered me with honors."



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