Senate resolution authorizes war for regime change in Syria

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The Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday passed a resolution backed by the Obama administration that grants the president a free hand to carry out a devastating war against Syria in order to "change the momentum on the battlefield" and strengthen the US proxy forces seeking to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

The resolution, passed by a vote of 10 to 7, with seven Democrats voting in favor, incorporates an amendment proposed jointly by Republican John McCain and Democrat Chris Coons declaring that "it is the policy of the United States" to shift the relationship of forces on the ground in favor of the opposition and enhance the fighting capabilities of "elements of the Syrian opposition."

The resolution as initially formulated late Tuesday, following a hearing with Secretary of State John Kerry, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey, included language allowing the president to use whatever force he deemed necessary to "deter and degrade" Syria's capacity to use weapons of mass destruction now or in the future, provide "all forms" of military and political aid to the so-called "rebels," and "limit support from the Government of Iran and others for the Syrian regime."

The language of the resolution amounts to a blank check for the president and the Pentagon to unleash a torrent of death and destruction on Syrian troops and civilians alike, oversee the toppling of Assad and the installation of a US puppet government, and extend the war into Iran and even Russia. It explodes the White House's lying pretense that it is preparing only a "limited" and "narrowly targeted" intervention—what President Obama last week called a "shot across the bow" of the Assad regime.

It exposes Obama's claim that the planned attack will not have as its goal regime change. It makes clear that with the impending attack on Syria, US imperialism is expanding its military aggression in the Middle East to engulf not only Syria, but also Iran and, ultimately, Russia and China. The looming attack is part of a drive for US hegemony in the oil-rich Middle East and the whole of the Eurasian region whose ultimate endpoint is World War III.

The resolution grants the president an initial 60 days of military operations in Syria, with the option to extend the war by another 30 days. It includes a provision barring the use of American ground troops, but adds the caveat "for the purpose of combat operations." This loophole will be used to escalate the use of CIA and Special Forces troops within Syria.

Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois, the second-ranking Democrat in the Senate, who voted for the resolution, said afterward of the military attack, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, "This won't be a limited, but a powerful response."

Before passing the resolution, the committee voted down a resolution by Democratic Senator Thomas Udall that would have limited military action to the use of naval vessels and blocked US war planes from entering Syrian airspace. The committee also voted down a resolution by Republican Rand Paul that invoked the War Powers Act of 1973 to stipulate that the president can order the use of military force only if the US is facing imminent attack.

Passage of the resolution is the first hurdle in the White House drive to obtain congressional authorization and launch military action as early as next week. On Wednesday, Kerry, Hagel and Dempsey appeared before the House Foreign Relations Committee to make the case for war.

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The text of the resolution incorporates the lies, unsubstantiated allegations and factual distortions that have been employed by the administration to justify an unprovoked war of aggression against yet another impoverished former colonial country.

It asserts, without any substantiation, that the Assad regime used chemical weapons in an attack on opposition-held suburbs of Damascus on August 21, repeats the administration's claim of over 1,000 fatalities in the alleged attack, accuses Assad of having carried out previous chemical attacks (ignoring United Nations charges that the "rebels" were responsible for those attacks), and blames the Syrian government for the massive toll in death and destruction that has resulted from more than two years of a civil war instigated and backed by Washington.

The key role of Senator McCain in formulating the resolution sheds light on the real background to and purpose of the war drive. McCain and his chief ally in the Senate, Lyndsey Graham, have for months been leading the agitation in favor of a major US escalation in Syria. Obama met privately over the weekend with McCain and Graham, and a White House spokesman welcomed the passage of the resolution with McCain's regime change language following the committee's vote.

At the end of May, McCain made a surprise visit to Syria and met with opposition militia leaders. His trip coincided with a government military offensive that had brought the US-backed opposition to the brink of defeat. It is likely that at that time he discussed plans for a major provocation to create the pretext for direct US military intervention.

It has been widely reported that in mid-August, US, Jordanian and Israeli Special Forces troops led hundreds of insurgents across the Jordanian border into Syria to launch an attack on Damascus. According to Syrian officials, the government launched a pre-emptive military offensive in areas around the capital city, including the site of the alleged August 21 chemical weapons attack, to halt this attack on Damascus.

This evidently set the stage for the alleged chemical attack that has been seized on as the pretext for a war for regime change—one that is in violation of international law, as it lacks the sanction of the UN Security Council.

It is clear that whatever occurred on August 21 was set in motion by the United States in order to save its proxy forces from defeat and escalate its imperialist aggression in the region.

In staging such a provocation and employing the technique of the Big Lie, the Obama administration is taking a page from the playbook of the Hitler regime. Every Nazi aggression—from the annexation of Czechoslovakia to the rape of Poland—was justified as a morally driven response to external aggression or attacks on the human rights of German populations.

Moreover, the war against Syria completely explodes the fraud of the so-called "war on terror." As is well known, Washington's major allies on the ground in Syria—and the forces that benefit most directly from US intervention—are Islamist militias linked to Al Qaeda, such as the Al Nusra Front.

Washington's alliance with Al Qaeda, however, is not new. It goes back to the CIA's funding and operational support for Osama bin Laden in the US-backed war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. And it includes US support for Al Qaeda-linked forces in the war for regime change in Libya in 2011.

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