

France to await US Congress vote, UN report before attacking Syria

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After the G20 summit in St. Petersburg, which was dominated by sharp differences over war in Syria between Russia and the US, French President François Hollande announced Friday that he would address the public this week about French participation in the war.

He said: “When the [US] Congress will have voted, perhaps Thursday or Friday, and once we have the [UN] inspectors’ report, doubtless by the end of the week, there will be a decision to take, including about going to the United Nations ... At that time, I will have all the elements necessary to address the French people to tell them the decision I will have taken for France.”

Hollande’s sudden 180-degree turn on the question of a UN investigation of the August 21 attack in Ghouta testifies to the French government’s contempt for the UN investigation on Ghouta and the truth about what happened there. His shift on the UN is a political manoeuvre to boost public support for the French Socialist Party (PS) government’s unpopular war drive against Syria.

Initially, Hollande urgently demanded an attack on Syria, while insisting there was no need to wait for the UN inspectors’ report on the Ghouta attack. Washington, London, and Paris intended to use the Ghouta attack as a pretext to rapidly start a war against the Syrian regime in defiance of public opinion. They therefore had no interest in investigating the attack.

The NATO powers’ war drive hit a first obstacle, however, in the vote against military intervention in Syria in the British parliament—which proved that they had no factual basis for their charges that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad carried out the attack.

When the Obama administration decided to postpone its onslaught on Syria until after a vote on war in the US Congress, Hollande was forced to also put off military action. This further exposed the lie that the US-

French onslaught against Syria would consist of a few “limited” strikes. France did not attack Syria by itself precisely because it did not have the military capacity to wage the type of mass bombing campaign and intervention that Washington and Paris are preparing in the Middle East.

Under pressure from France’s European Union (EU) partners—who signed a resolution on Saturday in Vilnius signalling support for a possible military strike, but asking the UN to provide political cover for it by first issuing its report on Ghouta—Hollande then shifted his position on the UN.

Hollande implied that the UN report will confirm the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime: “There was indeed use of chemical weapons on August 21, all the indications agree, the UN must bring confirmation of this fact.”

The Hollande government is preparing to seize upon UN findings that chemical weapons were used to claim that it was the Assad regime that used them and that war is necessary. In fact, Western-backed, Al Qaeda-linked opposition have chemical weapons, and that the Ghouta attack was likely carried out by opposition forces—who were losing in the battlefield—to provide a pretext for military intervention by the major powers. (See also: Report links US-backed Syrian opposition to Ghouta gas attack)

Though official polls show that two-thirds of the French population opposes war with Syria, the Hollande administration is downplaying the vast implications of such a war. Instead, Hollande presented it as designed to “punish the regime and in no way to spread conflict beyond Syria’s borders.”

The claim that military action is only intended to enforce a ban on chemical weapons use is a lie. France is lining up behind Washington’s preparations for a

massive war to destroy the Assad regime and replacing it with Western-backed stooge regime in Syria. Such a war would draw in Syria's allies in Iran and Lebanon, and possibly even Russia, against the US-French onslaught in the Middle East.

Whatever the ultimate outcome of the US Congress vote or UN report, the Obama and Hollande administrations intend to push ahead with a major war, based on the same methods Washington used to launch the Iraq war ten years ago: lies about weapons of mass destruction.

Hollande's decision to drag France into a major war in defiance of public opinion and in violation of international law demonstrates the absence of any constituency for democratic rights in the French ruling class. Their pro-war propaganda is supplemented by the propaganda of affluent middle class organizations such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA).

Such forces, who are routinely interviewed by the corporate media, seek to disorient public opposition to war by posing as opponents of government policy, while echoing the media's pro-war lies and calling for stepped-up intervention.

The NPA in particular has supported the campaign for regime change in Syria from the outset, promoting CIA backed Islamist opposition forces as revolutionaries fighting Assad regime, and criticizing the imperialist powers not providing enough arms to them.

In a September 4 interview to *Les Inrockuptibles* magazine, former NPA spokesman Olivier Besancenot spoke on the Syrian war. He challenged none of Hollande's lies regarding the chemical weapons attack, but criticized Western intervention as "ineffective" as a method to topple the Syrian regime. He noted that, if the Western powers attack, Assad "could even get the support of a portion of the population by claiming that 'a foreign intervention is occurring.'"

Instead, Besancenot called for stepped-up arming of the opposition militias by the imperialist powers. Western intelligence agencies have pumped hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of military supplies into Islamist opposition forces, which are largely dominated by groups affiliated to Al Qaeda. Besancenot promoted this operation as an "on-going revolution" that Western intervention threatened to disrupt.



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