

US exploits Russian proposal of talks to prepare new pretext for Syria war

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US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov are due to meet today in Geneva for talks over Moscow's plan for Syria to give up its chemical weapons. Even before the two sit down, however, the Obama administration has already made clear that the US intends to exploit the negotiations to provide a new pretext for its planned military onslaught on Syria.

In an online chat forum yesterday, Kerry insisted that the US would continue to push for a binding UN resolution that would punish Syria if it delayed or broke off the disarmament process envisaged in the Russian proposal. "We need a full resolution from the Security Council in order to have confidence that this has the force it ought to have," he said.

The French government has already drawn up a resolution that it plans to table in the UN Security Council that France's foreign minister Laurent Fabius declared would involve "extremely serious" consequences if Syria failed to adhere to a strict timetable for the destruction of its chemical weapons stocks.

The French resolution also contains a condemnation of the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad for the gassing of civilians. Like the Obama administration, the French government's "case" for punishing Syria is based on lies. It has provided no evidence that the chemical weapons attack on August 21 was carried out by the Syrian military, nor has it refuted the findings of a Russian investigation which found that anti-Assad Islamist militias were responsible.

The resolution also calls for those responsible for the August 21 attack to be placed on trial in the International Criminal Court in the Hague. The aim is clearly to charge Assad and his closest supporters as the means for decapitating the Syrian government and

advancing the real purpose of the US war plans: regime change in Damascus.

Russia has already rejected the French resolution, making clear that it will veto any attempt by the US and its European allies to blame the Assad regime for the chemical weapons attack or to gain UN sanction for war on Syria. President Vladimir Putin declared that the threat of military action was "unacceptable" and said that the Russian proposal would only work if the US renounced the use of force. China has also opposed the French resolution.

The Obama administration is using the threat of a unilateral US military attack on Syria to try to bully Russia and China into agreeing to a UN resolution that can be exploited as the pretext for war. It is the same modus operandi that the White House gangsters used to obtain UN support for imposing a no-fly zone over Libya that became the justification for a full-scale air war to oust Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

As was demonstrated by the Bush administration's illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003, weapons inspections provide an open-ended basis for a campaign of propaganda and lies. The US and its allies intend to compel Syria, like Iraq, to prove the unprovable—namely, that nowhere in its territory are there any hidden stocks of chemical weapons. In the case of Syria, however, the time frame is far shorter and US preparations for war, with or without a UN resolution, are already far more advanced.

Even before Kerry and Lavrov meet, the American media and political establishment are branding the Russian plan as a delaying tactic fraught with flaws. US State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki attacked the Russian proposal as lacking in detail, saying it had only so far "put forward ideas." White House spokesman Jay Carney put the onus on Moscow to make the plan

work, declaring that Russia's "prestige" was now on the line.

The *New York Times* published a lengthy article emphasising the difficulties when "the chemical weapons complex of the fractured state includes factories, bunkers, storage depots and thousands of munitions" are "spread far and wide." The article cited a senior administration official as saying that securing chemical arms in a war zone was "just the first nightmare of making this [plan] work."

Senator John McCain, one of the most aggressive proponents of military action for regime change in Syria, declared: "I'm worried that we have a game of rope-a-dope for a while, and the slaughter goes on. We should have a very, very, very short period of consideration for this initiative." In other comments, he pointed to the Obama administration's own strategy, saying: "I believe that there is a possibility that this fails and we reveal the Russian initiative for what I think it is: It's a stalling tactic."

In reality, the Obama administration seized the Russian proposal right at the point where it appeared that its own resolution seeking Congressional approval for war on Syria was uncertain to pass. As in the case of the British parliament, American lawmakers confront overwhelming popular opposition to US attacks on Syria.

A decade after the US-led invasion of Iraq, there is widespread popular disbelief in the lies about the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons and that any US military action would be "limited, targeted and proportionate." Moreover evidence continues to mount about the reactionary character of the US-backed opposition forces that are waging a ground war to oust the Assad regime.

The sectarian character of civil war has been underscored in recent days by the attacks on Syrian Christians in the town of Maaloula by the Sunni Islamist Al Nusra militia.

A CBS News article noted: "Obama has spoken lately of war weariness. Americans are not weary. They are exhausted, terrified and besieged. After a week of constant administration lobby, public opposition to war in Syria hardened. Phone calls and emails to House and Senate offices are not running 10-to-1 against missile strikes. They are not running 20-to-1. In some cases, they are running 1,500-to-1 or 4,000-to-1 against

military action."

Despite such overwhelming popular opposition, working people can place no confidence in UN talks or a US Congress vote to halt the Obama administration's drive to war against Syria. Its plans to oust the Assad regime are driven not by concerns about Syrian chemical weapons, but by US imperialism's determination to ensure its domination over the Middle East and its crucial energy supplies.



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