

UK joins US military offensive in Iraq

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After days of denials and prevarication, the UK's Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition led by Prime Minister David Cameron has once again assumed a military role in Iraq.

Cameron has pledged that Britain would “use all the assets that we have,” including “military prowess” to defeat the Islamic State (IS) Sunni jihadist group.

Eight Tornado bomber jets have already been sent from RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus, supposedly to carry out surveillance along with Chinook helicopters. Cameron's promise that “Britain is not going to get involved in another war in Iraq” and will not be “putting boots on the ground” is worthless. Indeed, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon, speaking from Cyprus, said that the UK's military involvement in Iraq could last for “months.”

“This is not simply a humanitarian mission,” he told RAF flight crews. “We and other countries in Europe are determined to do what we can to help the government of Iraq combat this new and very extreme form of terrorism that IS is promoting.”

Troops from the 2nd Battalion Yorkshire regiment had been sent into the Kurdish capital Irbil for 24 hours to prepare the ground for a possible rescue mission, Fallon said, and the UK had already transported ammunition and arms supplied by other countries to Kurdish forces and will do the same itself in future.

With no political mandate, with no discussion in parliament, and after repeated statements to the contrary, the government is preparing for major military action in Iraq—the scene of one of British imperialism's greatest criminal ventures.

Cameron, in response to those identifying a change in line, said that this was not the case and that there was no need to recall parliament. The government had nothing to fear from a discussion in parliament as far as the opposition parties and its own ranks are concerned. Labour has done nothing more than to ask for

“clarification” of the government's position. But Shadow Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander told BBC Breakfast, “We have supported the steps that the British government, along with other European allies, have taken.”

In fact, Cameron's volte-face comes in the wake of a chorus of demands for Britain to prepare a military engagement in Iraq across the spectrum of official politics. All complaints centred on the accusation that the government was paralysed, and was losing ground to France and Germany as a result, due to fear of popular opposition to war.

Cameron's initial refusal to commit to military action in Iraq stemmed from last year's decision by British MPs to vote down a government attempt to back the United States and secure agreement in principle for military intervention in Syria. Combined with opposition from significant sections of the armed forces, who warned of a possible military conflict with Russia, the MPs acted in the face of overwhelming public hostility to British troops being sent to fight a war against Syria. For Labour, to have supported war would have ended any possibility of a political recovery based on party leader Ed Miliband's efforts to distance himself from the toxic political legacy of Tony Blair. For the Tories, it would have raised the possibility of enjoying only a single term in office—especially under conditions where millions are being hammered by austerity measures.

The retreat exacted a heavy price for Britain's ruling elite. In Washington's ensuing machinations against Russia, culminating in the installation of a puppet government in Ukraine after February's coup, Britain was excluded from a leading role as the US proceeded in an alliance with Germany, France and Poland.

As the US air strikes in Iraq began, and with parliament in recess, there were numerous demands for its immediate recall in order to give a mandate for the

UK to participate.

Various figures from the Armed Forces came forward, including Colonel Tim Collins, a retired 2003 Iraq War commanding officer, and General Sir Richard Shirreff, Britain's most senior officer in NATO until his retirement in March, who attacked "this commitment-phobic government that is terrified of being seen to be putting boots on the ground...."

Former chief of the general staff Lord Sir Richard Dannatt was most direct in addressing the vote against action in Syria. "That proposal was wrong and Britain was right to stay out," he wrote. "But one unfortunate consequence of that wise strategic decision was that many people have interpreted the UK's caution as evidence that we have lost the will to get involved in international affairs at all. Now we must demonstrate that when the issues are right, we will act in line with our values and our interests."

The same point was made by several Tory MPs, while Saturday saw the publication of a letter written to Cameron by the Bishop of Leeds, with the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, complaining that "We do not seem to have a coherent or comprehensive approach to Islamic extremism as it is developing across the globe" and urging measures to defend Iraqi Christians.

But easily the most strident voices calling for a military response came from leading figures from the Labour Party. Jack Straw, defence minister under the Blair Labour government and a key player in the illegal invasion of Iraq, said, "We are getting close to the need to recall Parliament" and "have to look at what further action we could take by way of military assistance."

Mike Gapes MP, a former chair of the foreign affairs select committee, declared, "The prime minister may feel unable to act now following his defeat and mishandling of the Syria debate last August. He should get over it and urgently recall parliament.... I hope we can then, with opposition support, achieve a massive vote for UK military intervention alongside our US and NATO partners...."

Tom Watson MP even equated the necessity to confront IS to that of Britain's entry into the First and Second World Wars. "We cannot abandon Iraq to the black flags of IS any more than we could leave Europe to the Kaiser or to his black-shirted inheritors 22 years later...at stake are hundreds of thousands of lives now

and Britain's role in the world for decades to come."

It was in the face of such sustained criticism that Cameron felt obliged to declare that Iraq today was not "a problem that should be defined by a war 10 years ago."

Nothing could be further from the truth. Any intervention in Iraq conducted under the banner of humanitarian intervention—either to rescue the Yazidis, or to aid the Kurds or Christians—would be a resumption of the predatory war to control Middle East oil supplies. Only the faces of some of the political criminals involved will have changed.



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