

# UK mounts massive police operation after Paris terror attacks

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Britain's Conservative government has responded to the terrorist attacks in Paris by mounting a massive police military operation and seeking to further its plans for a military offensive in Syria.

On Saturday morning, Prime Minister David Cameron chaired a meeting of the Cobra emergency committee. Senior ministers went in attendance, along with the intelligence and security agencies and senior police officers.

Following the meeting, Cameron said in a TV address, “The [UK terrorist] threat level is already severe, which means an attack is highly likely, and will remain so.”

With Cameron attending the G20 summit in Turkey, on Sunday Home Secretary Theresa May chaired a second Cobra meeting, revealing afterwards that increased police patrols were on alert nationwide and border searches were taking place. Speaking on the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show*, May said that arrangements were in place for “military support” in the event of an attack. She would not confirm rumours that the Special Air Service (SAS) was now operating undercover on the UK's streets. But the *Sunday Times* political editor Tim Shipman confirmed that the SAS had been mobilised, stating, “an SAS counter terrorism unit, around 50 strong, has been moved from its base in Hereford to RAF Northolt with unmarked helicopters and on short notice to move” in anticipation of a terrorist threat.

An article in the *Sunday Express* gave more details: “More than 60 soldiers, including personnel from the SAS and the Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR), were last night operating under the direction of [London's Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorist Command] wing.” It added, “An unarmed unit of soldiers has been deployed to infiltrate key ‘areas of interest’ known to contain jihadi sympathisers. Another tranche, armed with nuclear, biological and chemical equipment, will be at a military base ‘within striking distance’ of London, on call to

respond to a major terror attack.”

The *Express* said the SAS units had been mobilised following “high-level meetings with senior intelligence officers from the Joint Terrorist Analysis Cell at [Britain's domestic spying network] MI5.”

The last time the SAS were called out onto Britain's streets was in the aftermath of the July 2005 terrorist bombings in London.

The Paris attacks resulted in calls from the media and sections of the military for Britain to take a central part in military strikes in Syria, in defiance of public opposition and a vote in Parliament in 2013 in which a Tory government motion endorsing military strikes was defeated.

These calls have been made by sections of the media for several weeks and had been voiced only the day before the Paris attacks, when the US administration revealed British citizen and Islamic State member Mohammed Emwazi had been killed in Syria in a “targeted” drone strike.

Emwazi, dubbed “Jihadi John,” was allegedly the person seen in several videos of ISIS beheadings of hostages. He was targeted just two months after UK Royal Air Force drones killed two British citizens by targeted assassinations in Syria.

Cameron said Emwazi's killing took place after the US and Britain had been working “hand in glove, round the clock” to locate him and claimed his assassination was “an act of self-defence.”

The most forthright calls for a military onslaught in Syria come from Britain's liberal establishment.

The *Observer*, the sister newspaper of the *Guardian*, came down in support of a British military campaign in Syria last week—using the pretext of the as-yet unexplained crash of a Russian passenger plane over Egypt.

In its editorial Sunday, the *Observer* complained that

the US carries out most of the air combat missions over Iraq and Syria, whereas “Britain, to the annoyance of Washington and to the evident chagrin of David Cameron and his defence secretary, Michael Fallon, is involved in Iraq, but not in Syria.”

Such a “chaotic, incoherent military effort is unlikely to meet with any great success, even if it includes credible ground forces, which at present it does not,” the editorial stated. “A common strategy with common objectives and a common approach is what is required to make the air war against Isis more effective. And after Paris, there will be pressure on [party leader] Jeremy Corbyn to reconsider Labour’s opposition to extending RAF operations into Syria.”

The *Sunday Times*, owned by the oligarch Rupert Murdoch, hailed the “war on terror” as espoused by US President George W. Bush 14 years ago, as one “devoid of the normal rules of combat.”

Claiming that ISIS was losing ground, particularly to Kurdish forces in the town of Sinjar, in northern Iraq, it said, “The West should be clear that the defeat of Isis requires the deployment of force on the ground.”

In the pro-Labour *Daily Mirror*, Colonel de Bretton-Gordon, a former British Army officer, was afforded space to write, “Britain can no longer dabble in this war against ISIS.” Bretton-Gordon claimed that the 2013 vote in the British parliament against war in Syria, “was a key factor in the rise of ISIS” and had “hugely diminished the UK’s ability to influence on [sic] world events.”

This was justification for his call that, “It is now time for our politicians to debate and vote for comprehensive strikes against ISIS in Syria and where ever they might be, to ensure the terror we saw in Paris doesn’t pervade our lives for the next generation or so.”

He concluded with the menacing warning that, “The time for talking is nearly over, it is action that is now required, it is time to defend our democracy with all means even if that means not always practising it.”

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was due to make a speech on domestic and foreign policy, including criticism of the wars conducted by British imperialism since 2001, but cancelled the engagement.

Parts of Corbyn’s speech were trailed beforehand and read, “For the past 14 years, Britain has been at the centre of a succession of disastrous wars that have brought devastation to large parts of the wider Middle East. They have increased, not diminished, the threats to our own national security in the process.”

Labour is formally opposed to British involvement in

Syrian air strikes, without United Nations authorisation. However, it is understood that dozens of Labour MPs would back the Tory government over military strikes, even without such authorisation.

Also interviewed by Andrew Marr was Labour’s shadow justice secretary, Lord Falconer, a close ally of Tony Blair. Falconer said, “We must do everything we possibly can to end ISIL.” He suggested that Labour could support UK strikes without UN agreement, and added, “I’m not urging troops on the ground, but ultimately ISIL have to be defeated and it can’t just be from the air.”

There remain serious divisions in British ruling circles over the efficacy of military action in Syria. In an interview with the *Independent on Sunday*, Shadow Foreign Secretary Hilary Benn reiterated that Labour would only back air strikes in Syria if Cameron had UN authorisation. Shadow International Development Secretary Diane Abbott, a close ally of Corbyn, told *Sky News*, “We can only agree to bombing Syria if there’s a UN resolution, also, and this is my particular concern, if there’s a plan to deal with the refugees that will result from further military action.”

Earlier this month it was reported that Cameron had shelved plans to hold a parliamentary vote on British military intervention, following a report by parliament’s Foreign Affairs Select Committee that was highly critical of any British involvement.

On Saturday, James Kirkup, politics editor of the right-wing *Daily Telegraph* warned, “Our immediate urge to show solidarity with the French (and avenge British loss in Paris) may soon collide with the British aversion to foreign military intervention that was born in Iraq and nurtured in Libya.”



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