

British PM sets out plans for Syrian partition and moves against Russia

Julie Hyland**27 November 2015**

Prime Minister David Cameron's statement to parliament in support of the British bombing of Syria was an exercise in imperialist chicanery.

Cameron is attempting to reverse the humiliating defeat he suffered in August 2013 when parliament vetoed his plan to join US-led military action against Syria. Widespread public opposition, combined with differences within the ruling elite over the likely prospects of the intervention, saw 30 Conservative backbenchers join with Labour to oppose British military involvement.

The prime minister has said that if he can secure enough agreement he intends to hold a vote authorising British military action next week.

The UK is already heavily involved in military operations—including bombing—in Iraq, and its forces participate in covert operations in Syria. In August, Cameron authorised the extra-judicial killings of British citizens in Syria, with barely a protest. At the same time, he made clear that he hoped to exploit divisions within Labour over military involvement to be able to win a second vote.

His efforts appeared to have been stymied by a report by parliament's Foreign Affairs Select Committee highly critical of British involvement, issued at the beginning of this month. The committee described the situation in Syria as a "proxy war as much as an internal conflict"—a "multi-layered conflict," involving Russia and Iran on the one side and the US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar on the other.

While it was silent on the lead role played by the US and Britain in facilitating the growth of ISIL as part of their goal of regime change in Syria, the report expressed concern at the potential for a broader military conflagration. There was a "genuine issue" as to the potential of Russian and US aircraft "becoming

involved in hostilities" as "multiple air forces are now pursuing different agendas in Syria," it warned.

Such fears were realised when, last weekend, Turkish F-16 fighters shot down a Russian Su-24 bomber along the Syria-Turkey border. This blatant act of aggression could only have been authorised at the highest level of the Turkish state and with Washington's approval.

Turkey's provocation was directed against French attempts, in the wake of the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris, to build a coalition involving Moscow and Washington against Islamist terror groups in Syria. This is opposed by the US and Turkey, who rely on the Islamist militias targeted by Russia as proxy forces on the ground against the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

Extraordinarily, Cameron made no mention of the downing of the Russian jet in either his statement to parliament or his 36-page reply to the select committee report. Instead, the prime minister extolled the virtues of the so-called Vienna Process—talks involving Russia and the US for a "transitional" government of national unity—even as it was being blown out the skies.

This is not merely an attempt to avoid certain uncomfortable truths. It is a conscious and wilful deception of the British public as to the advanced dangers of a new world war being prepared by imperialist intrigue.

The prime minister's oral and written presentation heaped one lie upon another. He claimed that the terror attacks in Paris provided a "moral case" for British military action. "If we cannot act now, when would we act?"

The United Nations resolution passed in its aftermath, that member states can use "all necessary measures" against ISIL, legally sanctioned UK involvement in bombing, he claimed.

As to questions over the specific military contribution

that Britain could make, Cameron claimed that the UK has “unique precision missile capabilities, which allow for accurate air strikes with low collateral damage.”

The biggest lies of all, however, are those claims that UK intervention will help preserve Syria’s territorial integrity and create an “inclusive” and “democratic” transition government to secure peace in the region.

Even while insisting the target of British involvement is not regime change, the prime minister stated that it is wrong to consider Assad as the “lesser of two evils.” He declared, “Syria has not been, and should not be, reduced to a choice between Assad or ISIL.”

“Our Syria strategy aims to enable a ceasefire to be established between the regime and the opposition,” Cameron stated. Military action is aimed at “relieving the pressure on the moderate opposition, whose survival is crucial for a successful transition to a more inclusive Syrian government.”

How is this “pressure” on the “moderate opposition” to be alleviated? “Alongside efforts to secure a political transition, together with our allies we are putting diplomatic pressure on Russia to end its attacks on moderate Syrian forces and instead coordinate its military efforts with the Coalition against ISIL.” [emphasis added.]

British military involvement, then, is part of pressing Russia to give up support for Assad. How is Moscow to be persuaded? Cameron doesn’t say. Given the British government’s defence of Turkey’s attack on the Russian jet—Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond denounced those critical of the attack as “apologists for Russia”—the silence is deafening.

Nor did Cameron directly name the “moderate Syrian forces” Russia should be pressured to back. And for good reason, as this would mean identifying Islamist militias, including the Al Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front with which Washington is currently allied.

The real objectives of British imperialism become clearer in the prime minister’s scenario for “transition.”

Earlier in the week, former UK Foreign Secretary William Hague let the cat out the bag when he said, “The borders of Syria and Iraq were largely drawn by two British and French diplomats in 1916. They should not be considered immutable. If the leaders of either country cannot construct a state where all communities can live together, it will be right to consider

international support for their partition.”

Cameron’s 36-page reply to the select committee amounts to planning for such a partition.

“The Syrian Kurds have successfully defended Kurdish areas in Northern Syria from sustained ISIL attack and retaken territory from ISIL, such as around the city of Kobane,” he argues. “The Kurds will also play an important role in a political settlement for Syria which respects Syria’s territorial integrity.”

Of the Turkish bourgeoisie’s attitude to such a prospect—it has been working with ISIL against the Kurds—nothing is said.

However, he added that, “only moderate Sunni Arabs can retake traditionally Sunni Arab areas such as Raqqa,” while “in Southern Syria, the Southern Front of the Free Syrian Army has consolidated its control over significant areas...”

The Southern Front of the Free Syrian Army includes al-Nusra. As for the “moderate Sunni Arabs” to be involved in taking Raqqa, this seems to be a reference to US initiatives centred on the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces.

US special operation troops are currently working with this loose coalition of Kurdish and Arab fighters, despite their “capabilities and conflicting loyalties” being “hard for Washington to assess,” the *Financial Times* reported.

Washington’s alliance with the group is directly occasioned by moves against Russia. The *Financial Times* states that it follows a “major rethink” of US strategy in Syria, “after Russian air strikes that began in late September coincided with the collapse of its programme to train Syrian rebels.”

“Obama has to be seen to be more active in response to the Russians. We have to back diplomacy with the threat of force,” the *FT* quoted a former senior US administration official.



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