

## David Cameron's Contradictory Narrative: "Fighting ISIS" as a Means to Destroying the Syrian State...

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*The strategy is to unite all anti-government death squads, including the Islamic State group, in an all-out war of destruction against the Syrian state.*

*On Dec. 2 the British House of Commons voted to launch airstrikes on Syria; within an hour of the vote being taken, British fighter jets were on the way to Syria. According to the government's motion, the strikes were to be "exclusively against" the Islamic State group, the leading force within the anti-government insurgency in Syria.*

And yet, in August 2013, David Cameron had proposed sending the Royal Air Force to Syria to support that insurgency. The proposal was defeated when it became clear that Syria's key allies, Russia and Iran, were not going to back down; but the British government has been one of the most vocal and belligerent supporters of the insurgency since it began in 2011. Indeed, Cameron has arguably become its leading international spokesman and lobbyist. So is it really credible that he has suddenly switched sides, and is now committed to wiping out the vanguard of the struggle he has done so much to promote?

Amena sent me this picture of her home in Syria, destroyed by secular, moderate airstrikes: <https://t.co/PyO6tAiqPp> [pic.twitter.com/5BJP8Q5vgb](https://pic.twitter.com/5BJP8Q5vgb)

— Charles Davis (@charliearchy) [November 5, 2015](#)

Well, no. And to be fair to Cameron, he made it clear within minutes of his opening speech to that it is the destruction of the Syrian state, not the Islamic State group, that remains the ultimate goal of British policy in Syria. Of course, he didn't put it quite like that. But after what is now 16 years of British government dedication to the creation of one failed state after another - from Kosovo to Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya - the euphemisms have become all too familiar. "The real plan," Cameron noted, is to "get a transitional Government in Syria." We have seen "transitional governments" before: they are generally comprised of people who have spent more time in London, Paris or Washington than in the countries they are supposed to be governing, with no real support base in the country, airlifted in by NATO in order to sign contracts with the West, and in no position whatsoever to actually govern. The "transition" in question, then, is from independent regional power, to dysfunctional failed state. "The first step," he concludes, "is going after these terrorists today."

Exactly how bombing the Islamic State group is supposed to be the "first step" toward overthrowing the Syrian government was left to the chairman of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Sir Crispin Blunt, to explain. "The crucial issue," he said, is "how would we, the United Kingdom, exercise the greatest influence? Everything that I have

heard in the last month of taking evidence on this issue suggests that our role as a compromised and limited member of the coalition against ISIL, operating only in Iraq, weakens that influence.”

This is very revealing. The “crucial issue” is nothing to do with the Islamic State group, national security, or terrorism; but rather how to gain “greatest influence” in order to push the “real plan” of destroying the Syrian state. Blunt is arguing that Britain should bomb Syria in order to ensure that the coalition maintains its focus on regime change. The airstrikes have, it seems, been conceived primarily as a means of degrading not the Islamic State group, but Russian influence on the U.S. and France, lest the focus shifts to actually defeating terrorism. Militarily, the latest phase of the British involvement in Syria has one key aim: to co-ordinate the various death squads – including the Islamic State group – into a more effective fighting force for the destruction of the Syrian state. One group is to be given overt support – to be funded, trained, equipped and given air cover by the Royal Air Force. This is the 70,000 so-called “moderates” that Cameron argued in Parliament are to be the “ground force” of Britain’s campaign.

The definition of a moderate, here, was outlined by the government as anyone fulfilling two criteria: not being a member of al-Qaida or the Islamic State group and be “committed to a pluralistic Syria” – that is, willing to sign up to any old guff that guarantees Western support. Presumably (and no one in the government was willing to deny this), this group includes extremist groups such as Ahrar al-Sham, along with all the other groups participating in the al-Qaida-led Army of Conquest, and thus effectively acting as extensions of al-Qaida without officially being al-Qaida themselves.

These forces cannot possibly serve as effective ground troops against ISIS; firstly because, whenever they have taken on the Islamic State group in the past, they have lost (handing over all their Western-supplied weapons in the process); secondly, because, as U.K. Member of Parliament Imran Hussein pointed out, they are now concentrated mainly “in the south-west of Syria while Daesh (Islamic State group) is in the northeast.” And as Scottish National Party parliamentary leader Angus Robertson noted, “There is no evidence whatsoever that they would definitely deploy from other parts of the country to counter Daesh.” Michael Stephens of the Royal United Services Institute has also argued that they “are not powerful enough to take on al-Qaida or IS (Islamic State group) by themselves, or in many cases break their current alliances/cease-fires with them.”

The *raison d’être* of Cameron’s 70,000 fighters is to overthrow the Syrian government, not the Islamic State group, and in many cases they are in formal alliances with al-Qaida and the Islamic State group to achieve this. Clearly, then, if they are indeed to be the ground forces of Britain’s air war, this can only be a war against the Syrian government, not against the Islamic State group.

The second group is the Nusra Front, the official al-Qaida affiliate in Syria (out of which the Islamic State group emerged in January 2014). According to Cameron’s definition, they are not going to be provided with open and direct support from the British government. But the terms of the government’s motion, which vows airstrikes “exclusively against” the Islamic State group means they will not actually be targeted either. They will be given a free hand, while their allies in the Army of Conquest will be openly supplied and supported.

Finally, how do airstrikes against the Islamic State group help facilitate regime change?

Labour Member of Parliament Frank Field shed some light on this when he asked Cameron: “Is the prime minister aware of press reports that in the recent past 60,000 Syrian troops have been murdered by ISIL and our allies have waited until after those murderous acts have taken place to attack? ... If ISIL is involved in attacking Syrian Government troops, will we be bombing ISIL in defense of those troops, or will we wait idly by, as our allies have done up to now, for ISIL to kill those troops, and then bomb?”

Cameron’s answer – which was no answer at all – suggested that Britain will indeed continue the existing coalition policy of allowing the Islamic State group to slaughter Syrian government troops at will.

Putting all this together, the strategy becomes clear: increase support and air cover to non-Islamic State group (and increasingly al-Qaida led) anti-government fighters, while employing a carrot-and-stick policy toward the Islamic State group itself: bombing them if they threaten other anti-government forces, but giving them a free hand when it comes to massacring Syrian soldiers – and in so doing, encouraging them to turn all their fire on the Syrian government.

In this sense, the strategy is to unite all the anti-government death squads, including the Islamic State group and al-Qaida, in an all-out war of destruction against the Syrian state. Despite appearances, this is the same war Cameron wanted in 2013; but it is now being conducted under the name of fighting the very terrorism it aims to facilitate.

Dan Glazebrook is a political writer who has written for RT, the Guardian, the New Statesman, the Independent and Middle East Eye, among others. His first book “Divide and Ruin: The West’s Imperial Strategy in an Age of Crisis” was published in October 2013. He is currently researching a book on U.S.-British use of sectarian death squads against independent states and movements from Northern Ireland and Central America in the 1970s and 80s to the Middle East and Africa today.

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