

In National Address, Obama Presses Ahead With War Plans Against Syria

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US President Barack Obama spoke on national television last night, presenting to the American people the latest diplomatic tack in his administration's drive for war with Syria. His rambling 15-minute address notably did not ask Congress to authorize war. Rather, it sought to develop UN negotiations emerging from a Russian-Syrian offer to destroy Syria's chemical weapons as a political framework for launching a war, in defiance of international law and mass popular opposition in the United States.

Without providing a scintilla of probative evidence, Obama repeated claims that the Syrian government of Bashar Al-Assad was responsible for a chemical weapons attack on August 21. Obama tried to bolster this assertion with various unsubstantiated assertions, combined with lurid images of the victims of the attack.

On this basis, the administration is seeking some rationale for launching a war with disastrous consequences for the people of Syria, the Middle East and the entire world. While repeating the lie that US war plans would be "limited," Obama at the same time declared that their aim would include "degrading Assad's capabilities"—that is, destroying large sections of the Syrian military and other institutions. "The United States military doesn't do pin pricks," he added.

With his resolution authorizing war with Syria facing likely defeat in the US Congress, Obama instead backed negotiations over the Syrian and Russian offer to turn over Syria's chemical weapons to international monitors and then destroy them. Obama said he had asked Congress to "postpone a vote to authorize the use of force, while we pursue the diplomatic path."

He explained, "I've spoken to the leaders of two of our closest allies—France and the United Kingdom—and we will work together in consultation with Russia and China to put forward a resolution at the UN Security Council requiring Assad to give up his chemical weapons and to ultimately destroy them under international control ... Meanwhile, I've ordered our military to maintain their current posture to keep the pressure on Assad and to be in a position to respond if diplomacy fails."

Washington's allies are already moving quickly to ensure that the UN talks either fail, or provide a pseudo-legal fig leaf for a US war. The French government has announced that the UN resolution it is drafting would specifically allow military action against Syria as an "enforcement" mechanism. Paris cast aside protests by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who insisted that a UN resolution should not authorize military action against Syria. In response, Russia cancelled a UN Security Council meeting it had called for Tuesday.

Obama made clear that the US military was standing by to launch air strikes at a moment's notice. The warships in the Mediterranean would maintain their "current posture to keep the pressure on Assad and to be in a position to respond if diplomacy fails," he said.

Nowhere did Obama address the obvious contradiction in his position: if this war is truly about Washington trying to stop Syria from using chemical weapons, why is it continuing to press for war after the Syrian government has pledged to give them up?

Obama noted popular concern at launching a war in which the United States would intervene to support opposition militias led by Al Qaeda-linked forces. However, he dismissed these concerns with the absurd claim that a US decision not to directly intervene militarily would strengthen Al Qaeda more. He said, "It's true that some of Assad's opponents are extremists. But Al Qaeda will only draw strength in a more chaotic Syria if people there see a world doing nothing to prevent innocent civilians from being gassed to death."

This is patently false. Al Qaeda-linked forces who lead the US-backed opposition militias fighting the Syrian army are facing defeat, and they will inevitably profit from a US attack aimed at disabling and destroying the Syrian military. This testifies to the fact that Washington's claims to be fighting a global "war on terror" against Al Qaeda are politically fraudulent.

If Obama's arguments, examined rationally, are absurd and incoherent, it is because they are built around a lie. The pretext for war—Obama's unsubstantiated allegations of Syrian use of chemical weapons—is not the motive driving US policy. Rather, Washington is intervening to support opposition forces organized and funded by the US and its European and Middle East allies, aiming to reverse the course of the US-led proxy war in Syria, topple the Assad regime, and set up a broader regional confrontation with Assad's main allies, Iran and Russia.

Initially, the Obama administration hoped to utilize the August 21 attacks—likely carried out by opposition forces backed by the US and Saudi Arabia—to quickly launch a war before any questions could be asked, let alone answered. The chemical weapons attack, the administration and its allies declared, crossed a "red line," and a military response was necessary.

A bombing campaign led by the US was required because the opposition forces they are backing were on the verge of collapse.

The US government and its European allies were not prepared, however, for the overwhelming popular opposition that developed to their war plans, as masses of people recalled the lies about weapons of mass destruction that were used to justify the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. This has repeatedly undermined the imperialist powers' various strategies to rapidly start a war. On August 29, the British House of Commons voted against authorizing military force against Syria, depriving Obama of international support.

Obama responded by announcing that he would organize a vote for war in the US Congress, to provide political cover for a war of aggression. However, it soon became clear that the US House of Representatives might also vote against authorizing war. Finally, in yesterday's speech, Obama left unclear whether there would be a Congressional vote at all, while incoherently arguing that Washington had to prepare military strikes, whatever the outcome

of the UN talks.

Thus, on the one hand, Obama declared that war against Assad is necessary, because Syrian chemical weapons are “a danger to our security.” On the other hand, trying to downplay the scale of the war he is preparing in an attempt to lull public opposition to it, he noted: “The Assad regime does not have the ability to seriously threaten our military ... Neither Assad nor his allies have any interest in escalation that would lead to his demise.” Yet this demonstrates precisely that Syria poses no danger to US security, and that Obama’s pretext for war is a fraud and the planned war is illegal.

Behind the panoply of lies, the Obama administration, abetted by the entire political establishment and the media, wants a military solution. The discussion now about a UN resolution has perhaps temporarily delayed, but has in no way ended the threat of war.

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