

NATO Powers Move to Exploit Refugee Crisis to Intensify Bombing of Syria

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Even as tens of thousands of Syrians flee to Europe, the NATO powers are proposing to step up the bombing of their war-torn country and the drive for regime change in Syria.

According to a report in the *Sunday Times*, British Prime Minister David Cameron is seeking the support of sections of the Labour Party for a plan to address the migrant crisis that involves bombing Syria and destroying the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The plan would be voted upon in the British Parliament in October.

Yesterday Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, demanded “air strikes and other British military assistance to create secure and safe enclaves” in Syria. This would mean bombing Syria and seizing its territory, which would be an aggressive attack on Syria and an act of war. Nonetheless, British officials rushed to support Lord Carey’s proposal.

“We’ve got to defeat these criminal gangs who trade in human misery and risk people’s lives and kill people. You’ve got to deal with the problem at the source, which is this evil Assad regime and the [Islamic State (IS) militia] terrorists,” declared UK Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne.

Osborne’s statement is the height of political cynicism. It is the US and NATO-backed intervention in Syria, along with the financing of Islamic fundamentalist organizations by their allies in the Gulf monarchies, which created the conditions for the emergence of ISIS. Civil war has been deliberately stoked as part of a policy of undermining and overthrowing the Assad government.

Now, as tens of thousands of Syrian refugees stream into Europe, the NATO powers intend to exploit the crisis to intensify their drive for regime change in Syria, which will only force more Syrians to flee their country.

London’s aggressive posture received support from Paris, after French President François Hollande proposed “to neutralize” Assad at an ambassador’s meeting in Paris last month. A top secret military meeting at the Elysée presidential palace on Friday reportedly discussed France taking on the role of a “team player” in a US-led coalition to carry out air strikes in Syria.

Speaking to *Le Monde*, French military sources indicated that they expected they would have US military support for a war for regime change in Syria. “The Americans have officially declared that they are in this for the long term, with an aerial campaign that will last at least three years,” one official declared.

French opposition politicians made tactical criticisms of Hollande's proposal, indicating that they would prefer integrating Russian and Iranian forces into war planning in Syria. They also indicated that they wanted to avoid a re-play of the situation in September 2013, when Paris aligned itself with Washington to push for war in Syria, only to find itself humiliated when the Obama administration decided not to attack Syria and called off the war without consulting Paris.

If an intervention is going to take place, it requires a broader agreement with partners besides the United States. Russia and Iran must be reintegrated. France must get back to an independent policy in Syria. The last time we spoke about strikes, we were pretty aligned [on Washington]," declared former conservative French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin.

The military escalation not only threatens more mass carnage and social devastation in Syria, but a direct clash between nuclear-armed powers, as Washington threatens to destroy the Syrian regime and Moscow considers launching a war to defend Assad, a key Russian ally in the region.

To say we're ready to do this today—so far it's premature to talk about this. But we are already giving Syria quite serious help with equipment and training soldiers with our weapons," Russian President Vladimir Putin declared on Friday during an economic forum in Vladivostok.

Putin also indicated, however, that Moscow could support negotiations that could lead to a political settlement in Syria and possibly the stepping down of Assad. "In general, the understanding is that this uniting of efforts in fighting terrorism should go in parallel to some political process in Syria itself," he said. "And the Syrian president agrees with that, all the way down to holding early elections, let's say, parliamentary ones, establishing contacts with the so-called healthy opposition, bringing them into governing.

Washington quickly moved to criticize attempts by Moscow to boost its influence in Syria. On Friday, US intelligence officials claimed that Russian troops were building an air base near the coastal Syrian city of Latakia, from which they could launch air strikes.

As part of its alliance with Syria stretching back to Soviet times, Russia has for decades operated a naval base at the nearby port city of Tartus.

On Saturday, US Secretary of State John Kerry called his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to complain of indications of an "imminent enhanced Russian military build-up" in Syria.

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