

# Britain's parliament votes for war in Iraq, and also Syria

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Britain's parliament has voted by a massive majority to support British air strikes in Iraq against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIL or ISIS).

MPs were recalled from a recess to hold a token debate, as the leadership of the three official UK parties had already declared their support for Britain joining the US-led bombing in Iraq.

MPs voted to support a motion put forward by the government that "recognises the clear threat ISIL poses to the territorial integrity of Iraq and the request from the Government of Iraq for military support from the international community and the specific request to the UK Government for such support."

This includes "the use of UK air strikes to support Iraqi, including Kurdish, security forces' efforts against ISIL in Iraq."

Just six MPs from Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative Party and only one from his Liberal Democrat coalition partners, voted against. An equally derisory 24 of the 257 MPs from the opposition Labour Party voted against, along with MPs from the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru and the Irish Social Democratic and Labour Party.

Air strikes by British war planes in Iraq were scheduled to begin bombing in the hours immediately following the vote. The BBC noted, "Their laser-guided bombs and missiles will be loaded and armed soon after Parliament gives the green light."

Emphasising the foregone character of the vote, the *Guardian* reported that RAF tornado jets based at Akrotiri, Cyprus "were out over Iraq on Wednesday night gathering intelligence in preparation for the attack—an exercise that has been ongoing in the past month." Also involved in the operation is an RAF Rivet Joint surveillance plane, based in Qatar.

The motion was only supposed to authorise British

military strikes in Iraq, stating that it did "not endorse UK air strikes in Syria as part of this campaign and any proposal to do so would be subject to a separate vote in Parliament." In reality, however, the debate was the preparation for war against the Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad. The RAF's Akrotiri base is just 100 miles from the Syrian border.

Flouting basic premises of international law, Cameron told parliament there was "no legal barrier" to similar action in Syria. He made clear that British armed intervention in Iraq was central to the eventual removal of the Assad government, using the pretext of the need to defeat ISIS. "[T]his strategy also involves political efforts to support the creation of a new and genuinely inclusive Government in Iraq and to bring about a transition of power in Syria that can lead to a new representative and accountable Government in Damascus so that it, too, can take the fight to ISIL," he said.

Cameron said military action by British forces could proceed in Syria without resort to parliament, declaring that "if there was a moment when it looked as though there could be an urgent humanitarian need for intervention, *I would be prepared to order that intervention and then come to the House and explain why.*"

The UK's return to war in Iraq would be open-ended, he said, commenting, "[T]his mission will take not just months, but years." The military operation in Iraq, "should not be a task that we are prepared to entirely subcontract to other air forces of other countries, so it is right for us to act."

Giving a preview of the carnage to be inflicted by Britain's armed forces, Cameron boasted that the UK has "unique assets that no other coalition ally can contribute." It could use the "Brimstone precision

missile ... which even the United States does not have,” adding that, “we have our unique surveillance and intelligence capabilities.”

The Brimstone missile was previously used by British war-planes in Afghanistan and in Libya in 2011.

Dismissing concerns about Britain’s criminal role in supporting the illegal US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which led to the collapse of Iraqi society and created the basis for the present crisis, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg said parliament could not be “trapped or paralysed by the past.”

Numerous MPs complained that the resolution should have authorised action in both Iraq and Syria. Tory MP Kenneth Clarke argued that MPs were backing “almost symbolic participation” in Iraq.

There were no limits to the hypocrisy displayed in parliament. Panegyrics were offered up time and again to what one MP called parliament’s upholding of “freedom, democracy, justice and human rights.”

Labour Party leader Ed Miliband endorsed the latest British war in the Middle East while politely suggesting that, “it would be better to seek a UN Security Council resolution.”

“[P]rotecting our national interest, security and the values for which we stand is why I will be supporting the motion,” he said.

Piling one lie upon another, Miliband concluded, “This is multilateral action, prompted by a legitimate democratic state; and a world order governed by rules, if it is about anything, must be about protecting a democratic state.”

The reality is that Britain and other imperialist powers are not remotely concerned about democracy or an order governed by any rules. The bombing campaign being carried out by the US in Iraq was not voted on by Congress. Nor has the United Nations passed any resolution authorising it.

The debate revealed the extent to which the ruling elite in Britain is firmly on a war footing, with the Labour Party leading the charge.

Shadow Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander said Labour was fully prepared to back any air strikes or other military action by British forces in Syria. He told parliament Labour would support future action in Syria without UN authorisation. Referring to any possible vetoes by China and Russia, he said, “The UK’s moral compass is not set in Moscow and Beijing.”

Labour MP John Woodcock said, “We must authorise action [in Iraq] in the knowledge of the lives, military and civilian, that may be lost.”

“We should recognise the legacy of the botched vote on Syria last year,” he said, referring to the August 2013 vote on a resolution on military action against Syria that went down to defeat when 39 Tories and Liberal Democrats voted against it, along with Labour MPs. “We must state our ambition now to put forward a strategy for action inside Syria too,” he added.

Labour MP Peter Hain, a cabinet member in the 2003 government of Tony Blair, backed the motion even as he recalled in the *Guardian*, “We went to a war [on Iraq] on a lie, and the aftermath was disastrous. All of which has made me deeply allergic to anything similar in the region – certainly anything remotely hinting at western cowboy intervention.”

Respect Party MP George Galloway, while opposing British and US involvement against ISIS, indicated he was not opposed to other allies of the US doing the bombing. He stated, “Saudi Arabia has 700 warplanes—get them to bomb. Turkey is a NATO member—get Turkey to bomb.”



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