



In brief: National positions on Syria intervention

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Section International Affairs and Defence Section

1 Russia

Russia has warned against any intervention without specific backing from the United Nations Security Council, and Russian ministers have made clear for some time that Russia was unlikely to vote in favour of any such resolution. Vladimir Putin said on 3 September,

According to current international law, only the United Nations Security Council can sanction the use of force against a sovereign state'.¹

The Russians felt that the 2011 resolution on Libya had been abused by Western powers to bring about regime change when it had only authorised humanitarian protection.²

Vladimir Putin said in September that he did not rule out authorising a Security Council resolution if there was clear evidence of the regime's responsibility for the chemical attack but that such evidence is not available:

We have no data that those chemical substances - it is not yet clear whether it was chemical weapons or simply some harmful chemical substances - were used precisely by the official government army.³

2 France

The French parliament, in an extraordinary session, debated the proposed action on 4 September. Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault commended the government's plans to the Assemblée Nationale:

Not to allow the crimes of the Syrian regime to go unpunished is on the contrary the way for the democracies to support the moderate Syrian opposition, as they should.

That is how we will be true to our values, the foundation for French intervention in the world. In fact France has a particular responsibility. It is a chance but it is also a responsibility, which contribute to the greatness of our country.⁴

Mr Ayrault said that the action would not involve troops on the ground and was not aimed at regime change. He said that France would have the support of European allies, countries in the region and particularly members of the Arab League.

¹ 'Putin does not rule out approving Syria strike with evidence Assad used chemical weapons', *ABC News*, 4 September 2013

² UNSCR 1973, 2011

³ 'Putin does not rule out approving Syria strike with evidence Assad used chemical weapons', *ABC News*, 4 September 2013

⁴ Assemblée Nationale, *Deuxième session extraordinaire de 2012-2013 Compte rendu Intégral*

The government was criticised for 'tagging along' behind the US government. Leader of the opposition UMP, Christian Jacob, asked: "Where are our allies? Where is the UN resolution?" He talked of "...total isolation of France within the Union. Can France, with no European ally, charge head down into an adventure of this sort? We think not."⁵

Mr Jacob went on to compare the French debate of an hour and a half unfavourably with the debate of 10 hours in Westminster. The opposition leader accused the government of risking a weakening of the presidential prerogative by calling parliament for an extraordinary session but also of weakening parliament, because the French public would wonder why their parliament had failed to stop the intervention, since there was no vote at the end of the debate.

The security of the French UN soldiers in Lebanon was a concern in the debate, while France was portrayed as a "spectator" to events in Washington on 9 September.

The centrist UDI party called for a UN mandate and questioned the reliability of French intelligence on August's gas attack. The left-wing FDG and RPG parties spoke in favour of a negotiated solution while Front National warned of the possibility of Sunni terrorist groups affiliated to al-Qaeda taking over in the event of al-Assad's fall.

The Speaker of the Syrian Parliament wrote to the French Speaker, as he had to the Speaker in Westminster, urging French deputies not to support military action.

Leaving for the G20 summit, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said that a strike could make negotiations more likely:

The position of France is to punish and negotiate. We are convinced that if there is no punishment for Mr Assad, there will be no negotiation. Punishment will allow negotiation, but obviously it will be difficult.⁶

The former Prime Minister, Alain Juppé, contradicted the line of his party when he said that waiting for the UN Security Council to act, in the face of Russian vetoes, amounts to "collusion on inaction."⁷

3 Germany

Germany has announced that it has no intention of contributing directly to any military action directed at Syria and that it hadn't been asked. However, indirect support for an operation (such as intelligence-sharing from a warship based in the Mediterranean) has not been ruled out. Germany's main aim seems to be to avoid getting dragged in, against the wishes of public opinion and in the middle of an election campaign, but not to take a high-profile negative stance, as it did by abstaining from the vote in the Security Council on the motion authorising action in Libya. Germany has offered political support in the form of a statement to the effect that there should be "consequences" for the chemical attack.⁸

German intelligence officials from the BND briefed politicians on 2 September with evidence that the Syrian government was responsible for the gas attack on 21 August. The BND found that rebel forces do not have the capacity to deliver chemical weapons in the way in which they were delivered on 21 August. The BND also said that they had intercepted a

⁵ Assemblée Nationale, [Deuxième session extraordinaire de 2012-2013 Compte rendu Integral](#)

⁶ 'Syria crisis: China joins Russia in opposing military strikes', *Guardian*, 5 September 2013

⁷ 'France on Syria: We are not being led by US', *EUObserver*, 5 September 2013

⁸ 'Atoning for Libya: Germany Seeks Low Profile in Syria', *Spiegel*, 30 August 2013

communication between a senior Hizballah official and the Iranian embassy in Damascus, in which the Hizballah official said that Bashar al-Assad had “panicked” and ordered the attack. The BND mentioned the possibility that the severity of the attack was the result of a mistake over quantities of chemical used.⁹

4 Italy

The Italian government has said that there should be no military action against Syria without a Security Council resolution. Enrico Letta, Prime Minister, has warned that any attack will make the refugee problem even worse and that the EU lacks a sufficiently robust plan to deal with it. Letta also urged Russia not to break definitively with the US at the G20 summit and to continue to pursue a negotiated solution.

5 China

China has backed Russia in saying that there should be no unauthorised strike on Syria. China also raised the worry of an increase in oil prices that could be brought about by a strike, which would threaten the world economic recovery.¹⁰

⁹ ‘Gas Attack: Germany Offers Clue in Search for Truth in Syria’, *Spiegel*, 3 September 2013

¹⁰ ‘Syria crisis: China joins Russia in opposing military strikes’, *Guardian*, 5 September 2013