

STOP THE WAR COALITION



Parliamentary briefing on the situation in Syria 13/04/2018

Would a bombing campaign be legal?

No. International law is unambiguous on this. Foreign military intervention is illegal except in cases when there is a UN resolution backing it, when it is requested by the target country's government, or in cases when it can be clearly demonstrated that there is an immediate question of self-defence. None of these exceptions apply here. Military intervention of any kind in Syria would be illegal

Shouldn't we be doing something?

It is simply not true that the West has been doing nothing in Syria. The US and others have been bombing in Syria for years. British forces were involved in covert action before 2015 and have been bombing the country regularly since the vote to bomb in 2015. According to Airwars.org the West has launched more than 15,000 airstrikes in Syria involving over 50,000 bombs and missiles in the last four years.

We should not accept the notion that military intervention is the only kind of foreign policy available. All wars end with negotiations and our interventions should be aimed at promoting a negotiated peace rather than prolonging the war. There have been a series of negotiations referred to as the Geneva peace process hosted by the UN. John Kerry, then US Secretary of State, undermined the process in January 2014 by demanding regime change in Syria at a Geneva II meeting, a position that is illegal. His stance was supported by the British government. The US has repeatedly refused to talk to Syria.

What could bombing achieve?

An estimated 400,000 Syrians have been killed in the war, over 100,000 of them civilians, according to the UN Envoy for Syria. Millions have been displaced and whole cities destroyed. Foreign intervention including from the US, Britain, France, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Russia have played a large part in prolonging the war and generating this disaster for the Syrian people. The last thing the Syrian people need is a new wave of bombing.

All the historical precedents show that bombing campaigns are disastrous. We were told that the bombing of Libya in 2011 was a humanitarian exercise. Instead it led to the end of the regime and turned Libya into a failed and fragmented state, which is now in total chaos, and a seedbed of terrorism.

What are the risks of an attack?

Any attack would dramatically increase tensions in an area that is already on the brink of regional war. Israel has already attacked Iranian positions in Syria. It is hard to conceive of a bombing campaign that would not lead to an attack on Iranian forces, potentially provoking retaliation. It would also clearly heighten the risk of confrontation with Russia, another nuclear armed power. Relations between Russia and the West are at their worst since the 1970s. Russian spokespeople have already briefed that they would shoot down missiles aimed at Syrian forces and may attack missile launch platforms. As a former British general has said 'that would be war'.

Could it at least deal with chemical weapons?

As early as 2012 The Geneva Centre for Security policy reported that Western governments believe that there are likely to be chemical stockpiles in the hands of opposition groups in Syria. Human Rights Watch have reported cases of opposition groups using chemical weapons in attacks. Given this situation it is impossible for even a sustained campaign to clear the country of these appalling weapons. In any case such a campaign would create such turmoil as to make further atrocities almost inevitable.