

The New York Times hails terror bombing in Damascus

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The *New York Times* reacted to the July 18 bombing in Damascus that killed several top Syrian security officials with unconcealed enthusiasm.

It titled its July 19 lead article on the attack “Bombing in Damascus Kills Key Aides to Assad and Deals a Potent Blow in the Struggle for Syria.” Its lead editorial, “Assassination in Damascus,” denounced Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and demanded that Russia allow the US to impose UN sanctions on Assad “if he continues to thwart the peace plan.”

The *Times*’ response to the bombing epitomizes the Orwellian character of the American media’s attempts to portray the Syrian war as part of a US struggle for democracy. Constructed from a series of grotesque euphemisms, the *Times* reports are clearly based on the assumption that no one will notice the contradictions in its positions, or even try to clearly comprehend what the newspaper is actually saying.

What the *Times* praises as a “potent blow” is a terrorist bombing carried by US-backed Syrian Islamist groups for the purpose of assassinating top officials in Damascus.

As for the “struggle for Syria,” that is an unprecedented logistics operation by the US, Britain and France to coordinate financial and military aid by the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms and Turkey’s Islamist government to right-wing Syrian forces hostile to Assad. Reporting favorably on this “struggle,” the same issue of the *Times* featured a second front-page article focusing on the Syrian insurgents’ spreading bombing campaign and the bomb-making classes being held for them by Islamist groups in Turkey. It titled that article “Rebels Hone Explosives Skills to Even the Odds.”

The fantastical presentation of a terrorist destabilization campaign waged by the US government

and its allies against the Assad regime serves a critical political function. It enables the *Times* to partially conceal US war aims behind the pretense that the US is waging a struggle for democracy and peace in Syria--though the US government has no intention of settling for a “peace plan” with Assad.

This pretense is so at odds with reality, however, that the *Times*’ attempt to promote it rapidly descends into absurdity. In an effort to depict US policy in Syria as one of support for a genuine democratic movement, the *Times* effusively praises as symbols of popular liberation the roadside bombs used by Syrian opposition forces. It writes: “The weapon that has long been championed in the popular imagination and public discourse of underground fighters as a means to kill or drive off foreign occupiers—whether Russians in Chechnya or Americans in Iraq or Afghanistan—has been turned against a standing Arab army by its own people.”

Even in an age that has seen no shortage of hypocrisy, the *Times*’ lyrical presentation of Islamist bomb-makers as capturing “the popular imagination” is truly stunning.

Washington occupied Iraq and Afghanistan—costing the lives of over 1.2 million Iraqis, hundreds of thousands of Afghans, and thousands of US and NATO troops—claiming that it had to fight a “war on terror” against Islamist forces. It routinely launches drone strikes in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa to kill without trial anyone suspected of ties to such groups.

Yet the US media applaud without an afterthought the terrorist methods of Syrian Islamists who—for now at least—are working with Washington.

What would have happened had a bomb gone off in the headquarters of the Syrian National Council, the

leading US-backed Syrian opposition group? Washington would doubtless have denounced it as a terrorist atrocity and used it to press for regime-change in Syria.

This was essentially the situation that emerged in 2005 when the Bush administration asserted without proof that Syrian forces in Lebanon were responsible for the murder of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. The US then forced the resignation of the Lebanese government and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

At the time, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said, “We condemn this brutal attack in the strongest possible terms.” He called Hariri’s death “a terrible reminder that the Lebanese people must be able to pursue their aspirations and their own political future free from violence and intimidation and free from Syrian occupation.”

No such statements have emerged from US officials today, however, because they see terror bombings as a key political instrument in their Syrian campaign. Indeed, the *Times* wrote that after the Damascus bombing, “analysts wondered if other military units and key lieutenants would be more inclined to switch sides” and support the US-backed “rebels.”

The broader geopolitical aims underlying the US campaign to remove Assad were laid out in a July 20 article in the *Times*. It made clear that the war is a struggle to re-integrate Syria and the entire Middle East into Washington’s political orbit. The US calculates that installing a puppet regime in Syria will allow it to crush all opposition in the Near East and isolate Iran.

The *Times* wrote: “The fall of the Assad government would remove Shiite Iran’s last and most valued foothold in the Arab world, and its opening to the Mediterranean. It would give Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states their long-sought goal of countering Iranian influence in the region, finally splitting the alliance between Tehran and Damascus that has lasted for decades ... Already the militant Palestinian group Hamas, long dependent on Syria and Iran, has thrown its support behind the Syrians on the streets seeking Mr. Assad’s overthrow. Worse might follow, from Tehran’s point of view. Iran and Syria’s last revolutionary ally, the Hezbollah party that dominates Lebanon, would lose one of its main sources of financial support.”

For his part, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah responded to news of the July 18 bombing with a speech stressing the role the Assad regime played in arming Hezbollah against the Israeli attack in 2006: “The most valuable weapons we had in our possession were from Syria. The missiles we used in the second Lebanon war were made in Syria. And it’s not only in Lebanon but in Gaza as well. Where did these missiles come from? The Saudi regime? The Egyptian regime? These missiles are from Syria.”

The Damascus bombing has exposed the social physiognomy of the Syrian opposition and US imperialism’s goals in backing it. Claims that these forces are carrying out a revolution against Assad aim only to confuse popular opposition to the war and provide the rationale for a layer of petty-bourgeois “left” groups—like the International Socialist Organization in the US, the British Socialist Workers Party and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France—to line up behind the imperialist war drive.

After the Damascus bombing, political forces supporting the Syrian opposition as a revolutionary force stand exposed as instruments of Islamist reaction and US and European imperialism.



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