

Washington's threat to invade Syria

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Charges by the White House and US secretaries of state and defense Thursday that Syrian government forces used chemical weapons have brought Washington to the brink of another war in the Middle East.

One decade after the Bush administration invoked the infamous pretext of “weapons of mass destruction” to launch a war of aggression against Iraq, the Obama administration is preparing to follow the same route to launch its own war for regime-change in Syria.

In a letter to members of Congress Thursday, the White House said that US intelligence believes “with varying degrees of confidence, that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on a small scale in Syria, specifically the chemical agent sarin.”

The letter reiterated Obama's threat that any use of chemical weapons “is a red line for the United States of America,” adding that the White House “has communicated that message publicly and privately to governments around the world, including the Assad regime.”

Secretary of State John Kerry has said that the Syrian regime had “launched two chemical attacks,” and Secretary of Defense Hagel told reporters in Abu Dhabi about the White House letter, adding that use of such weapons “violates every convention of warfare.”

A White House official told reporters that “all options are on the table in terms of our response.”

There is no more reason to believe the veracity of these reports than there was to give credibility to the Bush administration's claims about aluminum tubes, yellow cake from Niger and mobile biological weapons labs.

Today, just as a decade ago, these claims are employed purely as a pretext for aggressive war in pursuit of US geo-strategic interests in the Middle East.

The Pentagon has already dispatched another 200 US troops to Jordan's border with Syria to train so-called

rebels and, in Hagel's words, “improve readiness and prepare for a number of scenarios.” According to senior US officials who spoke to the *Los Angeles Times* last week, these scenarios include the deployment of 20,000 American soldiers and Marines to invade Syria on the pretense of “securing” its chemical weapons stockpiles.

The Obama administration's statements have provoked a flurry of demands for immediate military action.

Unsurprisingly, the opposition coalition cobbled together by Washington from the Muslim Brotherhood and other exile politicians immediately called for the Western powers to act “urgently and decisively” to prove that Obama's red line was not merely “empty words.” This coalition, proclaimed the “legitimate representative of the Syrian people” by the US and its allies, would be happy to ride to power on American tanks.

Senator John McCain, the Arizona Republican and former presidential candidate, demanded that Obama take action to enforce his “red line” by establishing a “safe area” on Syrian territory together with a “no-fly zone.” Such objectives would require wide-scale US bombing and the direct intervention of American troops.

Senator Dianne Feinstein (Democrat-Calif.), the chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, affirmed that military “action must be taken to prevent larger scale use” of chemical weapons.

Previously, the Obama administration had voiced skepticism about Israeli, British and French claims that the Assad regime had employed chemical weapons. The shift in line has nothing to do with new intelligence or fresh forensic evidence. Rather, the immediate impetus is a shift in fortunes for the Western-backed “rebels,” who have suffered a string of recent defeats at the hands of the Syrian army, most significantly the loss of the strategic town of Otaiba, east of Damascus,

which has served as the key conduit for weapons and aid being shipped in by the West and its allies among the Gulf monarchies.

Direct intervention is being prepared to avoid a crushing rout for the West's proxy forces, which have increasingly been dominated by Islamist militias, including those tied to Al Qaeda.

A central argument advanced by those calling for immediate US military intervention in Syria was summed up in a statement cited by the *New York Times* Thursday by Martin Indyk, the former US ambassador to Israel and Israel lobbyist. He warned that if the Obama administration gives "the impression that the president is not willing to enforce his red line, that will have consequences in the region, particularly when it comes to Iran's nuclear program."

In other words, Washington must wage a war of aggression based on lies about Syria's chemical weapons in order to prepare an even more catastrophic war against Iran on the pretext of curbing its nuclear program.

Indeed, Hagel made his allegations about Syrian chemical weapons attacks in the midst of a Middle East tour that centered on a \$10 billion deal to provide arms to Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, including F-16 warplanes, precision air-to-ground missiles, aerial refueling tankers and other weapons systems designed to prepare for a war on Iran.

The drive to war is fueled not by concerns over "weapons of mass destruction" or Syrian lives, as its proponents pretend. A US war on Syria, like the one waged before it in Iraq, will produce victims on an even more horrific scale than the sectarian civil war that the West has fomented—numbering in the hundreds of thousands or millions.

The real aims underlying this buildup to war are rooted in the protracted crisis of American capitalism and the US ruling oligarchy's attempt to offset this crisis through the use of military force to assert control over the strategic and oil-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia.

This criminal policy recalls nothing so much as the drive by the Nazi regime to extricate German capitalism from the crisis of the 1930s by means of aggressive war and conquest.

Military aggression against Syria and Iran poses a war bloodier than those waged by the US over the last

decade in Iraq and Afghanistan. It threatens a wider conflagration involving the entire region, as well as outside powers, such as Russia and China, whose interests are threatened.

It is not only the peoples of Syria and Iran who would pay the terrible price of such a war, but also the American working people, both in terms of the lives of their sons and daughters sent to fight it and the drastic escalation of austerity measures and attacks on living standards to pay for it.

Preventing such a catastrophe requires the building of a new mass antiwar movement based upon the independent mobilization of the working class in the fight for the socialist transformation of society.



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