

International law and the US war drive in Syria

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Amidst the mass of lies coming from US President Obama's press conference on Tuesday, one passage stands out.

Referring to entirely unsubstantiated charges of chemical weapons used by the Syrian government, Obama declared this a "game changer." Why? Because "we have established international law and international norms that say when you use these kinds of weapons, you have the potential of killing massive numbers of people in the most inhumane way possible..."

Words can hardly describe the level of hypocrisy in this sanctimonious declaration. They come from the head of a government and military that has unleashed violence all over the world and is guilty of the most brazen violations of international law.

This applies first of all to the Syrian operation itself. In the same press conference, Obama acknowledged that "from the beginning" the aim of the US has been to unseat the government of Bashar al-Assad. "We have worked to strengthen the opposition," he added. "We have provided nonlethal assistance to the opposition."

He went on to say that the administration has "asked the Pentagon, our military, our intelligence officials" to prepare a "spectrum of options." Media reports based on comments from administration officials after the press conference reported that the US is moving toward providing "lethal weaponry" to the "rebels." The US military has already moved to establish a base in northern Jordan, on the Syrian border, with the aim of bringing in 20,000 US troops.

At the same time, in the course of its intervention in Syria, the United States and its allies in Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been funneling weapons to Islamist fundamentalist forces associated with Al Qaeda, who

have launched an increasingly deadly campaign of terrorist bombings. This includes a car bomb in Damascus on the day of Obama's press conference, which killed at least 14 people.

The Obama administration has carried out a systematic campaign to incite a civil war with the explicit aim of bringing down the government of Syria, and it is now actively planning military intervention for this same purpose.

It is testament to the degenerate state of the media that it occurred to none of the assembled journalists to note that all of this is in flagrant violation of the basic principles of the United Nations Charter, which prohibits "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

The United States has been engaged in an unending campaign of aggressive war. Indeed, active plans for war against Syria go back more than a decade. In 2002, the government in Damascus was part of the Bush administration's expanded "axis of evil," which included Syria, Libya and Cuba in addition to the three initial members—Iran, Iraq and North Korea. Of these six, one (Iraq) was invaded under Bush and another (Libya) was bombed by NATO and the US under Obama.

Other basic principles of international law have been treated with equal contempt by the American government. Last month, a task force consisting of figures within the US political establishment concluded that the US "indisputably" tortured prisoners, and that this torture was approved by "the nation's highest officials."

At the same press conference at which he issued new threats against Syria, Obama acknowledged the hunger strike of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, who

have been held by the American military in brutal conditions amounting to torture for more than a decade, without charges or trials.

As for the Obama administration's drone assassination program, the UN Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights noted in March that it is being carried out in violation of international law and national sovereignty.

The fundamental issue involved in the US intervention in Syria is not the nature of the Assad government, but the nature of American imperialism. In considering the "humanitarian" pretexts employed by the Obama administration and its European allies, one is reminded of Hitler's letter to Chamberlain justifying the invasion of Czechoslovakia on the grounds that "Germans as well as the other various nationalities in Czechoslovakia have been maltreated in the unworthiest manner, tortured... [and denied] the right of nations to self-determination."

In the course of the efforts of the American ruling class to subject the Middle East more directly to its control, millions of people have been killed or turned into refugees. Now, the intervention in Syria, a key ally of Iran, threatens to unleash a regional war with catastrophic consequences for the entire world.

The expansion of war in the Middle East is being carried out behind the backs of the American people and against their will. A poll published the same day as Obama's press conference found that 62 percent of the American people oppose intervention in Syria, and only 25 percent support it.

Such polls are a pale reflection of the intense hostility to war within the United States. However, this popular sentiment finds no expression in official politics. Politicians of both parties demand immediate action. The middle class organizations that led anti-war protests 10 years ago have, through the mechanism of the Obama administration, become the most fervent supporters of the intervention in Syria.

Foreign and domestic policy are inextricably connected. The same financial aristocracy that has wreaked havoc all over the world is engaged in an unending war on the working class. Criminality abroad has its counterpart at home. International lawlessness is combined with expansion of the police state apparatus within the United States, directed against any opposition to the policies of the ruling class.

The intensification of class conflict within the United States and internationally creates an immense social constituency for opposition to war. This can find political articulation only through the independent political mobilization of the working class, connecting the fight against war to the struggle against the capitalist two-party system.



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