

Pentagon expands war plans against Syria

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While the Obama administration reiterates claims that its forthcoming attack on Syria will be a limited one-off affair, Pentagon planning envisions a much broader effort, according to a report Sunday by the *Los Angeles Times*.

The newspaper cited unnamed military officials who said the Pentagon “is preparing for a longer bombardment of Syria than it originally had planned, with a heavy barrage of missile strikes followed soon after by more attacks on targets that the opening salvos missed or failed to destroy...”

Two US officers told the newspaper that the Obama White House had asked for an expanded target list that would comprise “many more” than the 50 targets initially selected for possible attack. This gave an impulse to the planning of a more intense attack, which could involve at least three separate military components:

- * Tomahawk cruise missiles launched by five US guided missile destroyers currently on patrol in the eastern Mediterranean.

- * Cruise missiles and air-to-surface missiles launched by Air Force bombers.

- * Cruise missiles fired from the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group, with one cruiser and three destroyers, now stationed in the Red Sea. These missiles would travel over Saudi Arabia, Israel or Jordan to hit targets in Syria.

The *Washington Post* gave additional details of the set of targets that could be struck with US missiles, including “air defense infrastructure, long-range missiles, rocket depots and airfields.” The newspaper noted, “With roughly three dozen Tomahawk missiles loaded onto each of the four destroyers, a US strike could inflict significant damage on government forces...”

The six main air bases used by the Syrian military, as well as two dozen stationary radars, are among the

likely targets. Such an effort would have as its purpose crippling the ability of the Syrian military to resist a more protracted US military effort, such as the imposition of a no-fly zone on the country or an actual US invasion.

The Tomahawk missile has a range of 1,000 miles and can deliver either a 1,000 pound bomb or a package of 166 smaller “bomblets,” used against a more dispersed target such as a military encampment to cause maximum death and injury.

The *Post* also reported that Pentagon planners have drawn up a list of additional regime targets to be attacked in the event that the Syrian military retaliates against the US attack. In other words, if the Syrian regime opposes in any way the US aggression, that in turn will become a pretext for a further escalation of the violence.

The reference to restriking the same targets several times is a reminder of one of the most vicious tactics in the current US drone warfare in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and other countries. After a drone-fired missile hits a target and blows it up, a follow-up attack frequently targets rescuers, relatives of the victims and other “first responders,” often causing greater casualties than the initial strike.

It is a remarkable fact that the word “drone” does not appear in the vast outpouring of reporting and commentary on Syria in the US mainstream media. Given the reliance on drones by the Obama White House, this suggests that the press is following instructions to avoid the subject. There is little doubt that the first wave of cruise missiles will be preceded by drone-fired missiles aimed at Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, his immediate family members and other close regime allies.

Officially, from Obama on down, administration officials continue to claim that the planned attack on Syria is not the beginning of an open-ended military

attack, that it would “not be another Iraq or Afghanistan,” as Obama declared in his Saturday Internet/radio speech, and that it has been proposed purely in response to the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Damascus suburb of el-Ghouta.

White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough appeared on five Sunday morning television interview programs to reiterate this position. The next stage in the administration propaganda blitz will include appearances by Obama on six network news broadcasts Monday night and a nationally televised speech Tuesday night.

McDonough gave a hint of the broader strategic interests of American imperialism in the Middle East that underlie the attack on Syria, declaring on NBC’s Meet the Press, “This is an opportunity to be bold with the Iranians,” a reference to the government which is the leading ally of Assad and the main target of US military planning.

He elaborated on ABC’s “This Week” program, arguing that what Congress chose to do in response to the alleged nerve gas attack would have global consequences: “The answer to that question will be followed closely in Tehran, the answer to that question will be followed closely in Damascus, the answer to that question will be followed very closely by members of Lebanese Hezbollah.”

Underscoring the imperialist goals of the Syria campaign, the White House dispatched two former Bush administration officials, former national security adviser Stephen Hadley and former Cheney aide Eric Edelman, to make the case for war at a briefing for Republican congressional staff.

McDonough claimed that at congressional briefings mounted by the Obama administration, “nobody is rebutting the intelligence, nobody doubts the intelligence” claiming Assad was responsible for a chemical weapons attack.

This only proves the utter spinelessness of Congress, Democrats and Republicans alike, in the face of a decision for war taken by the military-intelligence apparatus through its mouthpiece Obama. As it happens, McDonough was adding another lie to the litany from the administration, as it happens, McDonough was once again distorting the facts, since a handful of congressmen have declared the administration’s “proof” unconvincing or purely

circumstantial.

In an effort to beat down public resistance to its war drive, the administration released thirteen video clips allegedly showing victims of the gas attack outside Damascus. Aside from the lack of any proof that these video clips are genuine, they say nothing about the perpetrators of the alleged chemical attack.

In fact, the Obama administration has no credible evidence to back up its assertions that a chemical attack was carried out by the Assad regime. On Sunday, the *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper cited German intelligence intercepts to conclude that Syrian President Assad did not order chemical attacks, contradicting repeated assertions by the Obama administration. It was also reported that the head of the German intelligence service, addressing a closed meeting of a parliamentary committee last week, said his agency did not have conclusive evidence as to the source of the alleged August 21 chemical attack on the Damascus suburb of Ghouta.

In his multiple television appearances on Sunday, White House Chief of Staff McDonough admitted that the Obama administration did not have “irrefutable, beyond-a-reasonable-doubt” evidence. “This is not a court of law,” he said, a remarkable statement from someone who is promoting a war that will kill untold thousands of Syrians, soldiers and civilians alike, and prepare the way for an even more bloody attack on Iran and an eventual military confrontation with Russia and China.



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