

# The great diversion: Democrats focus on sex scandal as conflict with Russia escalates

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With media coverage in America dominated by allegations of sexual assault against the Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, one would never know that the United States is on the verge of a massive escalation of operations against Syria and is preparing for a military conflict with Russia.

Friday's wall-to-wall coverage of Trump's alleged sexual transgressions featured a speech full of moralistic outrage by First Lady Michelle Obama, a veteran of the cutthroat Chicago political machine. She melodramatically declared that a leaked tape of Trump making lewd remarks had "shaken me to my core."

The entire media spectacle serves as a smoke screen for far-reaching plans by the present administration, with the full support of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, to implement deeply unpopular policies without public scrutiny. It serves as well to bury any discussion of substantive issues in the election campaign.

Behind a nearly total media blackout, the White House National Security Council held a closed-door meeting Friday to review the US military's campaign in Iraq and Syria. The only major media advance report on the meeting, carried by Reuters on Thursday and then quickly dropped, noted that US officials were weighing "air strikes on Syrian military bases, munitions depots or radar and anti-aircraft bases." Asked about the meeting at a press conference Friday afternoon, deputy White House press secretary Eric Schultz refused to even acknowledge that it was taking place.

The meeting was held just one day after the US military dramatically escalated its role in the conflict in Yemen, launching cruise missile strikes against sites controlled by the Houthi militia. This followed less than a week after the US-backed Saudi military bombed

a Houthi funeral in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, killing at least 140 civilians and wounding more than 500 others.

Within hours of the meeting of Obama's war council, NBC Nightly News led its Friday broadcast with an exclusive report, citing unnamed intelligence officials, that the White House is "contemplating an unprecedented cyber covert action against Russia in retaliation for alleged Russian interference in the American presidential election."

This vague report sets a bellicose tone for scheduled discussions between US Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, on Saturday.

Britain, France and Germany, meanwhile, are agitating for military escalation in the five-year proxy war to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. On Tuesday, UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson declared Russia a "pariah" state and called for anti-Assad and anti-Russian demonstrations at the Russian Embassy in London.

Johnson is hosting a meeting with Kerry and European foreign ministers on Sunday to consider "more kinetic options, the military options" in the war in Syria.

Russian officials, for their part, threatened retaliation against any US strikes against Syrian government targets. "Any missile or air strikes on the territory controlled by the Syrian government will create a clear threat to Russian servicemen," Russian Defense Ministry spokesperson General Igor Konashenkov said last week.

He added, "Russian air defense system crews are unlikely to have time to determine in a 'straight line' the exact flight paths of missiles and then who the warheads belong to. And all the illusions of amateurs about the existence of 'invisible' jets will face a

disappointing reality.” Konashenkov’s reference to ‘invisible’ jets was a warning that the advanced Russian S-400 air defense systems are capable of downing fifth-generation fighters with stealth capabilities, such as the American F-22 and F-35.

Should US air strikes against Syrian targets lead to the downing of American fighters by Russian forces, the White House will come under immense pressure to retaliate, potentially setting off a chain reaction that could result in the first use of nuclear weapons since World War II.

In evident preparation for such an eventuality, Moscow sent nuclear-capable Iskander-M missiles to the Russian Baltic city of Kaliningrad on October 8. From Kaliningrad, the missiles can strike targets, including NATO bases, across Poland and the Baltic republics.

Pointing to the dangers posed by these developments, Numan Kurtulmus, the deputy prime minister of Turkey, warned this week that if the war in Syria continues, “America and Russia will come to a point of war.” He added that the “proxy war” in Syria has led the world to the “brink of the beginning of a large regional or global war.”

The war in Syria is just one flashpoint in what military strategists are increasingly warning will be an “inevitable” conflict with major military powers. Last month, the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank, published a report titled *The Future of the Army*, which made clear that the US military’s primary concern is preparing to fight “major and deadly” wars between “great powers,” entailing “heavy casualties” and “high levels of death and destruction.”

At an October 4 meeting of the Association of the US Army in Washington, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley said war between the US and global powers such as Russia and China was “almost guaranteed.” At the same conference, Gen. William Hix, a top Army strategist, declared that a conflict “in the near future” with a country like Russia or China would entail a level of violence “that our armies have not seen on a scale probably since Korea, if not in World War II.”

These developments make it clear that the threat to humanity of a war between nuclear-armed powers is greater now than at any time since the height of the Cold War. The sharp escalation of military tensions recalls the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, which nearly

led to full-scale war between the US and the Soviet Union.

At that time, the press was eagerly following every detail of the showdown between the US and the USSR, while the Kennedy administration was intently seeking a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Now, the White House, driven by an unstable domestic situation and growing threats to its global dominance, is taking increasingly reckless measures, while the press virtually ignores the danger of a clash between the United States and Russia.

The media silence on the war threat is coupled with a drive, led by the Clinton campaign, the Democratic Party and the *New York Times*, to paint the fascistic Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump as an agent of Russian President Vladimir Putin. By framing the November 8 election as a struggle against Russian subversion and the “dictator” Putin, Hillary Clinton is seeking to create the conditions for claiming a popular mandate for military escalation and a confrontation with Russia should she capture the White House.

Both big-business parties, despite their tactical differences, fully support the US war drive, while the Libertarian and Green candidates are largely ignoring the war danger. The Socialist Equality Party alone has put opposition to war at the very heart of its campaign in the 2016 elections.

On November 5, the SEP will hold a conference, “Socialism vs. Capitalism and War,” which will discuss the political foundations for building a mass movement based on the working class against the US war drive. The *World Socialist Web Site* encourages all of its readers to register for the conference and take up the struggle against war.



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