

The bombing of Syria: A new chapter in the US drive for global hegemony

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With the cruise missile attack on Syria, the United States has opened up a new chapter in its war for global hegemony that it began more than a quarter century ago with the invasion of Iraq.

The claim that this attack is a response to the Syrian government's use of poison gas is a transparent lie. Once again, as in the air war against Serbia in 1999, the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, and the attack on Libya in 2011, the United States has concocted a pretext to justify the violation of another country's sovereignty.

The bombing of Syria is a unilateral abrogation by the US of the agreement negotiated with Russia in 2013, which resulted in the calling off of a long-planned direct military intervention by the US in the on-going civil war.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International warned in September 2013, "The postponement of war does not lessen the likelihood, indeed, the inevitability, of the outbreak of a major war. As the bellicose statements emanating from Washington make clear, the 'military option' remains on the table. Nor is Syria the only target for military attack. US operations against Syria would set the stage for a clash with Iran. And, still further, the logic of US imperialism's drive for global dominance leads to a confrontation with Russia and China. Nor can it be excluded that the conflict of interests among the major imperialist powers—for example, the United States and Germany—might under certain conditions metastasize into armed conflict." [1]

This warning has been substantiated.

Moreover, the attacks signify at least a partial resolution of the bitter conflict over foreign policy that has been raging within the highest echelons of the American state since last November's presidential election. With the support of the most powerful factions of the Pentagon and Central Intelligence Agency, the Democratic Party's demand for war against Syria and intensified confrontation with Russia has prevailed. The Trump White House has been compelled to execute an astonishing about-face from the policy that it had publicly announced only days earlier.

What is most extraordinary about these developments is the speed with which they have unfolded. The launching of cruise missiles against Syria came barely 48 hours after the first report of an incident in Syria's northwestern Idlib province, an area largely controlled by the Syrian affiliate of Al Qaeda, in which approximately 70 people were allegedly killed by poison gas.

Literally within minutes of the incident becoming known, the US corporate media swung into action denouncing the government of President Bashar al-Assad as the culprit. Editorialists for the *New York Times* and other major newspapers, along with the talking heads of

television news, all worked off of the same script, voicing moral outrage and demanding that Washington carry out retribution. Everything points to the media having been thoroughly briefed beforehand in order to carry out a carefully orchestrated war propaganda exercise.

On Wednesday, Trump echoed this media narrative at a White House press conference, declaring that the "heinous actions by the Assad regime cannot be tolerated," while his ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, issued an open threat of unilateral US military action. Trump repeated this line in a statement to the media from his Mar-a-Lago resort home on Thursday night.

The denials by the Syrian government of responsibility for any chemical attack have been summarily dismissed by the White House and the media, as has the record of Al Qaeda forces in Syria carrying out their own chemical weapons attacks and blaming them on the government.

The case of who was responsible for the alleged chemical weapons attack was "solved" in less time than the New York Police Department devotes to investigating a street mugging. The verdict was in and the sentence is now being carried out.

One only has to compare this forensic fast-track to the methods employed when the US military carries out air strikes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen killing hundreds of civilians. The Pentagon routinely insists that it has no credible evidence of any civilian casualties. In those cases in which it deems an investigation unavoidable, it usually takes weeks before it issues a report either denying the carnage or reporting a small fraction of the real death toll.

Barely 200 miles away from the site of the alleged chemical weapons attack, in the city of Mosul, the US has slaughtered hundreds of Iraqi men, women and children, burying entire families alive with bombs and missiles and destroying entire city blocks. Needless to say, the US corporate media is not broadcasting footage of the aftermath of these attacks with their charred dead and scattered body parts. None of the talking heads crying crocodile tears over the alleged gas attack in Syria have managed to summon up an ounce of moral outrage for those killed by the American military.

There is no doubt that the incident in Syria was a concocted pretext for the launching of a long planned US military intervention. The first place to investigate in order to get to the bottom of what happened in Idlib is the division of the CIA responsible for dirty operations in Syria and coordination with US proxy forces organized around Al Qaeda.

We have been here so many times before that it is hardly worth wasting the time required to refute the official story. It is now 14 years since the US launched its invasion of Iraq over similar lies about

weapons of mass destruction, setting into motion a vast slaughter that has claimed the lives of over one million people and turned millions more into refugees. Similar lies were told in 2011 to provide the pretext for the US-NATO war for regime change in Libya.

The media breathes not a word about these notorious precedents. Nor for that matter is there even a hint that this new US war is being carried out in alliance with Al Qaeda. The days of “embedded” journalism during the Iraq war now seem almost quaint. The media has abandoned the slightest pretense of independent journalism.

America’s ruling oligarchy demanded another campaign of military aggression to secure its hegemony over the Middle East and push back against its regional and global rivals, particularly Iran and Russia.

Like the invasion of Iraq, the intervention against Syria is a war crime. The US is intervening into a civil war that it itself provoked, armed and financed with the aim of toppling the Assad government and installing a US puppet regime. The attempt to achieve these aims by means of Islamist proxy forces has failed after claiming nearly half a million lives and turning five million Syrians into refugees. This failure is due to not only the Russian and Iranian backing for Assad, but also the fear and hatred felt by the majority of Syrians for the US-backed elements linked to Al Qaeda.

The abrupt shift in line by the Trump administration is a measure of the immense pressure for war from within the US capitalist ruling class. Only days before the alleged incident in Idlib, administration officials were stating that Assad’s rule in Syria was a reality that had to be accepted. Trump himself repeatedly voiced his disagreement with the Obama administration’s policy on Syria, insisting that the only US aim there should be to combat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The bitter denunciations of Trump by the Democrats and the Democratic-aligned media like the *New York Times* have been precisely over this question, his perceived softness on both the Syrian government and, even more critically, its chief ally, Russia.

Had Trump’s presidential rival Hillary Clinton won in November, it can be safely assumed that US bombs and missiles would have been striking Syrian targets within days of her election. Trump’s delay in pursuing such a course underlay the furor of the Democratic Party, the political instrument of Wall Street and the US military and intelligence apparatus, in denouncing him for alleged ties to Moscow.

Trump has now been brought into line. The shift in policy has been accompanied by a shakeup within the White House staff. Stephen Bannon has been removed from the National Security Council amid an increasing assertion of power by the military.

This was an entirely predictable change of course. As the *World Socialist Web Site* commented last December, amid Trump’s naming of one senior military officer after another to top posts in his administration: “As much as Trump is choosing ex-generals, the generals may themselves be choosing to join his administration, confident that they can ultimately dictate policy.”

For its part, Russia’s foreign policy lies in shambles, exposing the false perspective of those within the government of President Vladimir Putin who naively believed that something as insignificant as a change in presidents could alter the elemental drive by US imperialism toward new and ever wider wars.

The war against Syria has no popular support. The political shakeup in Washington and the preparations for renewed military aggression have unfolded behind the backs of the American people. The indifference of the ruling establishment to popular sentiment is reflected in the absence of even so much as an opinion poll on this

new war of aggression.

No critical voices are being raised against the war, either in Congress or the media. There is not even the pretense of a debate. Democrats who denounced Trump yesterday are now rallying in a bipartisan show of support for their “commander in chief” and the military. Typical was frequent Trump critic Congressman Adam Schiff (Democrat, California), who allowed that he would “feel more comfortable knowing that [Trump] was relying on Gen. Mattis and Gen. McMaster.”

Bernie Sanders, the former Democratic presidential candidate, self-described “democratic socialist” and leader of the supposedly “progressive” wing of the party said nothing about the war plans, because he supported them.

The entire opposition of the Democratic Party to Trump was based on these issues. All the talk about Trump’s hounding down of immigrants, deportations and wholesale attacks on democratic rights will quickly fade in the interest of unity on the question of war.

An attack on Syria carries with it the direct threat of a far wider and potentially world catastrophic war. What will be the reaction of Russia, a nuclear power, if American missiles kill its military personnel on the ground in Syria?

The American ruling class is willing to take the risk. Confronted with the protracted decline of its once unchallenged dominance of the world economy, it is forced to rely more and more on its military power as a means of asserting global hegemony. That such a course points inevitably to a new world war that would threaten the survival of humanity will not cause it to change course.

The actions of the US oligarchy recall nothing so much as Trotsky’s description of the world bourgeoisie on the eve of World War II, hurtling “with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe.”

The conflict that has erupted will not end with Tomahawk missiles. The drive of the United States for global hegemony cannot be resolved outside of an endless series of military escalations, each more reckless than the one before, leading ultimately to catastrophe.

These events express the burning necessity for the building of a mass anti-war movement, based on the working class, and having as its aim the abolition of the capitalist social order that is the root cause of war.

[1] David North, *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990 -2016*



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