

France: *Libération* makes “humanitarian” case for imperialist war in Syria

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After the alleged chemical attack in the Syrian town of Khan Sheikhoun, the French newspaper *Libération*, which has a reputation for being “left”, is launching an anti-Assad and anti-Russian propaganda campaign, trying to prepare public opinion for a NATO war with Syria and Russia.

The newspaper’s front page on April 5 consisted only of one shocking picture: on a black background, one sees seven children who died in the chemical attack, with the caption “Children of Assad”. This refers to the Syrian opposition’s accusations that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime caused at least 58 deaths and nearly 170 wounded in a chemical attack in an area controlled by rebel Islamist forces. The photo published by *Libération* was part of the US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley’s presentation at the UN Assembly denouncing the Assad regime.

In *Libération*’s editorial, titled “Impunity”, Alexandra Schwartzbord writes: “The children of Assad are watching us. They remind us with their wide-open eyes of the horror a few thousand miles from here, and that while we savor the first days of spring, a whole people is being massacred amid general silence. And the worst part is not this picture. The worst part is that it looks exactly like other photos taken four years ago.”

This is an odious attempt to exploit the death of children to stampede public opinion towards a military intervention in Syria, with incalculable consequences.

The propaganda of the warmongering “humanitarians” at *Libération* is based on speculation and lies. No investigation of the attack on Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province has established that Assad was responsible. Schwartzbord never mentions the fact that Islamist rebels in Syria have chemical weapons; instead, her editorial does everything to minimize readers’ doubts about the attack and incite them to

outrage against Assad.

While Schwartzbord refers to the 2013 chemical attack in Ghouta, this earlier event increases the likelihood that the Khan Sheikhoun attack is a provocation launched by the CIA or its allies. The attack on Ghouta took place as Washington and the European imperialist powers threatened Syria with a war. Then as now, Washington and Europe immediately insisted, without any investigation, that Assad was guilty.

Investigations by well-known American journalist Seymour Hersh established in 2014 that the Obama administration had ignored information that Al Qaeda’s had chemical weapons in Syria, and that the attack on Ghouta had been planned by Turkey. No government since has ever attempted to rebut Hersh’s analysis. The aim of the attack was to provide a pretext for the Pentagon to launch a war in Syria. Obama finally decided against a direct intervention, to the dismay of French President François Hollande, a few weeks later.

The worst aspect of the exploitation of the photos of gassed Syrian children by the press is that it looks so much like the monstrous propaganda of 2013.

In the meantime, the United States has attacked Syria with 59 cruise missiles. As soon as the reports of deaths by chemical weapons came from Khan Sheikhoun, the Trump administration and US media launched a propaganda campaign to blame Damascus. Trump immediately denounced Assad’s regime as “odious.” US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson also warned Russia over its support for Damascus. An intervention in Syria would cause millions, or even—if it triggers the “total war” with Russia that Holland raised as a possibility in 2015—billions of deaths.

Libération gives no evidence whatsoever to justify Schwartzbord’s indictment of Assad. It quotes

witnesses, including an official of a French NGO present in Idlib province, a doctor, and rebel spokesman in the region. They confirm the presence of Sukhoi-22 Syrian hunters in the area and missile fire at the time of the attack, and the fact that the symptoms of the victims are in line with those caused by a chemical attack.

However, only one witness concretely establishes a link between the Syrian Sukhoi and the use of chemical weapons: Ibrahim al-Idlibi, “a spokesman for the moderate rebellion for the region of Idlib” according to *Libération*. And even al-Idlibi's testimony does not establish that it was Assad's fighter jets who fired the gas.

According to al-Idlibi, “This is the first time that Sukhoi-22 hunters have been used with sarin-laden missiles launched at the same time as explosive missiles for massive attacks with the maximum possible death toll. ... Last week, the rebels carried out an offensive against Hama, and the regime suffered considerable losses. The attack of Khan Sheikhoun is revenge.”

If this is the best evidence *Libération* has, it must be said that for the time being no one knows what happened at Khan Sheikhoun, because no one has seriously investigated the attack. But not only does Schwartzbord lay the blame entirely on Assad, she also hysterically denounces Moscow.

Denouncing Russia's role in the 2013 crisis—Moscow served as a mediator to prevent imperialist intervention in Syria, in exchange for promises to destroy Assad's chemical arsenal—she adds, “But the worst of it, is not this picture. The worst thing is that the Russians had vouched for the destruction of the Syrian sites of chemical weapons four years ago.”

By questioning Russia's role in the destruction of Assad's chemical weapons, *Libération* casts doubt on any attempt to negotiate with Russia in the multiple conflicts it has with NATO, including in Syria and Ukraine. It is an extraordinarily reckless move, given the horrific consequences of a war between the largest nuclear powers.

The war in Syria is above all the responsibility of the United States and its European allies. The massacre of the Syrian population is the result of six years of proxy war waged by the imperialist powers against Syria, using Islamist forces linked to al Qaeda funded by the Gulf monarchists, as well as Kurdish nationalist

militias.

Schwartzbord depicts the world upside down, ending her editorial with lamentations about NATO's “helplessness”. She writes, “Europe is exhausted; its two pillars, France and Germany, paralyzed by electoral campaigns. And the Americans are governed by a madman who is so crazy that it is not clear if it would be better if he intervened or abstained. The worst is this impotence.”

This kind of passage gives full meaning to the expression “the bourgeois press”. What kind of newspaper asks itself whether or not it wants Trump, a far-right billionaire, to launch another bloody war to occupy yet another country in the Middle East, after Afghanistan and Iraq? It is a newspaper whose historical origins in the post-1968, petty-bourgeois “left” hardly mask its role as an instrument of pro-imperialist war propaganda.

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