

US threatens more strikes after cruise missiles hit Syria

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The day after US warships rained some 60 Tomahawk missiles on a Syrian government airbase, US officials made it clear that this unilateral and criminal attack against an oppressed former colonial country is merely the first shot in what is to be an escalating and widening campaign of American military aggression.

The governor of Syria's central Homs province reported Friday that the missiles killed at least 15 people, including nine civilians. Four of the dead were children. Many more civilians were injured by two of the missiles, which struck nearby villages. Six of the dead were Syrian personnel at the al-Shairat airbase.

The missile strike was the first time that Washington has carried out a direct military attack against Syrian government forces since the US and its regional allies orchestrated a war for regime change utilizing Al Qaeda-linked Islamist "rebels" as its proxy ground troops. The attack on the airbase is a direct intervention in that war on the side of the Al Qaeda elements.

Russian Prime Minister Medvedev warned on Friday that the immensely reckless action had brought Washington to "the verge of a military clash" with nuclear-armed Russia, which had an air unit at the base struck by American missiles.

Washington seized on an alleged incident Tuesday involving chemical weapons in the village of Khan Sheikoun in Idlib province as the pretext for Thursday night's attack. Syria has denied any use of such weapons, and Washington and its allies have presented no evidence to support their allegations in relation to the incident, which has all the earmarks of a provocation staged by the CIA and its Islamist proxies.

The Russian government and others have pointed out the obvious fact that the elaborate attack carried out Thursday night from two US destroyers in the eastern Mediterranean had to have been planned well before the alleged incident even happened. The event was staged, with Al Qaeda-linked and US-funded "media activists" conveniently on hand to film it, in order to provide Washington with the propaganda pretext it required for its aggression.

In a heated exchange in the United Nations Security Council Friday, US Ambassador Nikki Haley brushed aside denunciations by other diplomats that the unilateral US action was a gross violation of the UN Charter and international law, instead provocatively insisting that US imperialism is prepared to do the same thing again and far more.

"The United States took a very measured step last night," Haley said. "We are prepared to do more, but we hope that will not be

necessary."

Knowing full well that the US attack was imminent, Haley, who is acting as the council's rotating president for the month of April, postponed a vote on a compromise resolution calling for an objective investigation into the alleged chemical attack that was being drafted Thursday by the 10 nonpermanent members of the Security Council.

Washington has no interest in such a probe, which would almost certainly reveal that the source of any chemical weapons incident was not the government of President Bashar al-Assad, but rather the Al Qaeda elements that control that area of Idlib Province. There is also no doubt that the US strike provides the Islamist elements in Syria with every motivation for staging more chemical weapons incidents to provide the pretext for a spiraling escalation of US military aggression.

The UN Security Council session was convened at the request of Bolivia, Russia and Syria. Bolivian Ambassador Sacha Llorenti began the debate with a blistering denunciation of the US attack, declaring that the US officials "believe that they are investigators, they are attorneys, judges and they are the executioners."

He called the US strike "an extremely serious violation of international law," while stressing that this was "not the first time." Llorenti held up a picture of then Secretary of State Colin Powell delivering his February 5, 2003 speech to the same UN council insisting that Washington had irrefutable proof of nonexistent Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction," the notorious pretext for the US invasion barely a month later.

This war based upon lies, the Bolivian envoy added, resulted in "a million deaths" and "a series of atrocities" throughout the Middle East.

Llorenti denounced Washington for its "double standard," invoking "human rights," "democracy" and "multilateralism" only when it serves its own strategic interests. He recalled the series of military coups orchestrated by the CIA in Latin America and the Pentagon's training of Latin American security forces in the art of torture.

Russia's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, Vladimir Safronkov, similarly condemned the US bombardment as a "flagrant violation of international law," warning that the "consequences for regional and international stability can be extremely serious."

Safronkov charged that Washington had acted deliberately to derail any "independent and unbiased investigation" into the

alleged April 4 incident in Khan Sheikhoun. “You were afraid of it,” he said, “as its results might wreck your anti-regime paradigm.”

The Russian ambassador ridiculed the performance given earlier by US Ambassador Haley in which she held up the photographs of two Syrian children and demanded, “How many more children have to die before Russia cares?”

“I will not stage a cynical show and hold up photographs,” he said, but asked why there was no such concern for the children of Mosul, where a single US bombing raid killed over 300 civilians, most of them women and children, last month. Thousands more have been killed and injured in US airstrikes carried out in both Iraq and Syria.

Syria’s deputy ambassador to the UN, Munzer Munzer, denounced the US attack as a “barbaric, flagrant act of aggression,” and a continuation of US support to Al Qaeda-linked “terrorists,” who he noted had repeatedly stockpiled and used chemical weapons in attacks inside Syria with the support of their patrons, particularly in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

All of the representatives of the Western European powers voiced support for the US missile strike in terms that suggested that their governments may carry out their own military actions as part of an imperialist scramble for control of the oil-rich Middle East. Italy’s Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi was perhaps the most explicit along these lines, stressing his country’s “major and direct interests in the Mediterranean.”

The prospect for the US military action provoking a wider and potentially catastrophic world war was made clear on Friday, with Moscow’s announcement that it was suspending a 2015 memorandum of understanding reached with the Pentagon on “deconfliction,” which set up lines of communication between US and Russian military units operating in Syria to avoid clashes between the two countries’ warplanes. Russia also indicated that it would increase its missile defense systems around bases that it jointly uses with the Syrian military.

Meanwhile, senior Pentagon officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, told reporters Friday that they were investigating possible Russian “complicity” in the alleged chemical attack, indicating that the US military command is looking to ratchet up the confrontation with Moscow.

In Washington, Trump’s sudden reversal of his previous policy eschewing conflict with the Assad government in Syria in favor of a US military intervention centered on combating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) drew vocal bipartisan support, particularly from Democrats who had previously demonized the administration for its alleged ties with Russia.

To the extent that leading Democrats qualified their enthusiasm for the act of US military aggression, it was to demand that Trump spell out a proposal for its continuation and escalation.

The US Senate’s Democratic Minority Leader Charles Schumer praised the attack on Syria. “Making sure that Assad knows that when he commits such despicable atrocities he will pay a price is the right thing to do.” He added, however, “It is now incumbent on the Trump administration to come up with a coherent strategy and consult with Congress.”

Similarly, Senator Ben Cardin, the top Democrat on the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee urged Trump, “Give us your Syria strategy, and come to us if you’re using force, because you need to get authorization.” He added that while Thursday’s attack could be a one-off attack, “circumstances could change.”

“I think it was the right thing to do,” Senator Amy Klobuchar (Democrat, Minnesota) said of the missile strikes Friday. “Going forward I think we should have an Authorization for Use of Military Force, if in fact there are going to be additional actions taken.”

Unstated in the Democrats’ call for a new authorization to use of military force (AUMF) is the fact that both the Trump and the Obama administrations had previously invoked the 2001 authorization of military action against those responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington.

Now, however, the US is intervening militarily in a civil war that the CIA itself orchestrated, providing military support to Al Qaeda, which claimed responsibility for 9/11. The Syrian government reported that in the immediate aftermath of the US missile strike, both the Al Nusra Front and ISIS launched new attacks.

The Democrats’ rallying around Trump in support of US military aggression in Syria makes clear that the party’s opposition to the new administration was based not on its reactionary attacks on democratic rights, immigrants and the social conditions of the broad mass of the American people, but rather the threat that it would pull back from the longstanding plans of the US military and intelligence apparatus to escalate aggression and provocation against not only Syria, but its principal ally, Russia.

With the military consolidating its control over the Trump administration’s foreign policy through figures like Defense Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis, a recently retired Marine general, and H.R. McMaster, the active duty Army general who has taken over as national security adviser, the Democrats are rallying around Trump as the titular “commander-in-chief.”



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