

Media, political establishment treat dropping of biggest bomb since Hiroshima as nonevent

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On Thursday, the United States military dropped the biggest bomb since the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II. Twenty-four hours later, this development—by any standard a major world event—was being treated by the American and European media as insignificant.

Nor was concern expressed over the extraordinary manner in which the momentous decision to use the 22,000-pound Massive Ordnance Air Blast Bomb (MOAB) was made. On Thursday, US President Trump indicated that he was not asked to sign off on the bombing of the remote province of Afghanistan bordering Pakistan. On Friday, the US commander in Afghanistan said the decision to deploy the weapon was his.

By the time of the US network news broadcasts Friday evening, there was virtually no mention of the dropping of the “mother of all bombs.” That such an event is either praised or treated with indifference is a sure sign that the use of such weapons—and worse—is the “new normal,” to be treated as part of the ordinary operations of American imperialism all over the world.

On Friday, the major American newspapers either hailed the attack or maintained an editorial silence. The European press issued no protest. Neither German, French or British government leaders made a statement on the bombing, and so-called “left” political leaders and parties, including British Labour’s Jeremy Corbyn and the German Left Party, likewise remained silent.

Leading Democrats in the US, from Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi to the leader of the party’s supposed left-wing, Bernie Sanders, said nothing.

On Friday, the US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. John Nicholson, told the press that the decision to use a weapon so immense that the Pentagon had never used it

before, even in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, was merely a tactical one based on immediate military considerations. “It was the right time to use it tactically against the right target on the battlefield,” he said.

This claim is absurd. There is no rationale, from a purely military standpoint, to use such a weapon against a few hundred poorly armed guerillas hiding out in caves in eastern Afghanistan. Coming in the wake of the missile strike on Syria and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s ultimatum to Russian President Vladimir Putin to stop backing the Syrian regime, and in the midst of US threats of an imminent preemptive military strike against North Korea, the motives for the action were clearly political.

The aim of the bombing was to demonstrate to Syria, Iran, North Korea, Russia, China and all other current or potential opponents that there is no limit to the violence the US military will employ in pursuit of the global interests of American imperialism. The next step beyond MOAB is the use of nuclear weapons, and the Pentagon intended to send a message that it is prepared to take that step.

The *Wall Street Journal* summed up these political motives in an editorial Friday hailing the MOAB attack. It wrote:

“We may also assume that the missile-launching crowd in Pyongyang noticed the deployment of the GBU-43. Far be it from us to suggest that the US drop one on a North Korean nuclear factory. But in the space of a week, Kim Jong Un, Vladimir Putin, Bashar Assad, Xi Jinping and ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, wherever he is hiding, have learned that the US considers it to be in its interest to push back hard against its adversaries’ aggression.”

The *Washington Post* relegated the bombing to an inside page and did not directly address it editorially.

However, it articulated the general approval of the political establishment for Trump's foreign policy reversals over the past two weeks in an editorial titled "When flip-flops are welcome."

Citing Trump's adoption of a hard line on Syria and Russia and his declaration Wednesday that NATO is "no longer irrelevant," the *Post* wrote: "When a president moves from being so wrong to being so right on such important questions, the sensible response is not to carp but to celebrate, however cautiously."

The newspaper went on to praise the "excellent national security team that Mr. Trump has begun to shape," singling out his firing of Michael Flynn as national security adviser and removal of Stephen Bannon from the National Security Council. The *Post* expressed particular enthusiasm for the new national security adviser, H. R. McMaster, and Defense Secretary James Mattis, without mentioning that the former is an active-duty general and the latter a retired one, effectively placing US foreign and security policy firmly in the hands of the military.

In a similar vein, *Post* columnist David Ignatius, under the headline "In foreign policy, Trump gets a taste of success," wrote: "President Trump, after a mostly disastrous first two months, has had a good run these past two weeks in foreign policy. He acted decisively in Syria, gained China as a possible partner in dealing with North Korea, repaired relations with NATO and began addressing the serious tensions with Russia."

The *New York Times* did not publish an editorial or commentary on the MOAB bombing, exposing the fraud of its "human rights" posturing in support of American military aggression.

The website *Vox*, which speaks for the supposed left wing of the Democratic Party, published a comment by Zack Beauchamp that uncritically parroted the line of the Pentagon ("the US military has not found any evidence of civilian casualties") and repeatedly insisted that the dropping of the MOAB bomb was perfectly in order.

"There's no reason to assume this was something out of the ordinary," Beauchamp wrote, "even though the bomb was bigger than ones typically used by the US military." He added that "it actually kind of does make sense to use this bomb," and concluded, "The speculation, in short, was way over the top."

There is a fundamental political lesson that must be drawn from the ominous events of the past two weeks, culminating in the dropping of the closest thing to a nuclear bomb the American military possesses, with the general consent and approval of the media and political establishment. The bitter conflict within the American state and political establishment, which saw Trump assailed for being "soft" on Syrian President Assad and acting as Putin's lapdog, was focused entirely on imperialist foreign policy.

The Democratic Party fronted for the dominant sections of the intelligence and military establishment, which would not tolerate Trump's attempt to downplay the conflict with the Syrian regime and Moscow in order to focus more immediately on the confrontation with China. The Democrats used the fabricated claims of Russian hacking in the 2016 election to pressure Trump and effect a shakeup in his national security team.

Their differences with Trump over domestic and social policy are miniscule compared to their no-holds-barred support for the most hardline and militaristic factions of the military and intelligence apparatus.

The middle-class liberal and pseudo-left political forces in the leadership of the mass protests that erupted in January and February over Trump's attacks on immigrants and plans to gut basic social programs systematically channeled the opposition behind the Democrats, enabling this party of Wall Street and American imperialism to divert the anti-Trump opposition behind its campaign for military escalation in the Middle East and the preparation for war against nuclear-armed Russia.

The Democrats have all but dropped criticism of Trump's war on immigrants and social programs. Now, with Trump having adopted their foreign policy line, they will collaborate more directly in his social attacks.



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