

# US airstrike kills dozens amid mounting Western war propaganda over Syria

**Bill Van Auken**  
**28 February 2018**

A US air strike in Syria's eastern Deir Ezzor province killed at least 25 civilians Monday, the majority of them women and children.

The American bombing raid, which struck the settlement of Dahra Alounik, was reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitoring group that is hostile to the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

A Pentagon spokesman provided the standard and indifferent US military response to the exposure of such atrocities. "We take all allegations seriously and as we always do we will put it into our civilian casualty assessment and we will publish the results of those on a monthly basis," Col. Ryan Dillon told the Reuters news agency.

The American air strike was reported by the Turkish Anadolu agency to be part of a broader bombing campaign in Deir Ezzor aimed at halting the advance of forces loyal to the Assad government on strategically important gas and oil fields and facilities that had been under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which handed them over to the US military and its proxy ground forces dominated by the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia.

The same area saw a savage onslaught by US warplanes and artillery batteries on February 7 against a column of Syrian government forces in which at least 100 were killed, including a number of Russian military contractors.

The latest killing of Syrian civilians by US bombs—carried out in open violation of a supposed 30-day truce mandated by the United Nations Security Council last Saturday—attracted scant attention in the Western media, which has returned to the kind of full-throated outcry over alleged atrocities by the Syrian government and its principal military ally, Russia, which has not been seen since the siege of Aleppo at the end of 2016.

The sole focus of attention regarding the ceasefire has been the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta, which has been under the control of Islamist militias since 2013. Syrian and Russian forces have carried out an intense bombardment of the semi-rural district for the past 10 days, reportedly killing between 400 and 500 people. The Syrian military has

massed troops around the district for a planned offensive to retake one of the last strongholds of the Al Qaeda-linked "rebels" armed and funded by the CIA and Washington's regional allies.

The hypocrisy of the Western media's denunciations of the brutal methods employed by the Syrian government and its allies in eastern Ghouta is underscored by their near total silence on the far more extensive slaughter wrought by the US military in its devastating sieges against the Iraqi city of Mosul and Raqqa, the so-called Syrian capital of ISIS. Both cities were effectively razed to the ground by US airstrikes and artillery bombardment, while the number of casualties is estimated in the tens of thousands.

The same television networks and newspapers now repeating the phrase that eastern Ghouta has been turned into a "hell on earth"—or as *USA Today* put it a "tragedy beyond words"—summoned up no such outrage as Mosul and Raqqa were reduced to rubble. While in Ghouta, they have faithfully repeated every allegation made by the so-called "White Helmets," an ostensible civil defense group that functions as a propaganda outlet for the Al Qaeda-linked forces, no expression was given to the suffering of the populations subjected to the Pentagon's onslaught.

The one result of the UN ceasefire resolution has been Russia's imposition beginning on Tuesday of a five hour—9 a.m. to 2 p.m.—daily truce in Eastern Ghouta with the aim of allowing civilians to leave the war-ravaged enclave.

The so-called rebels, however, no doubt acting with the approval of Washington, sought to sabotage the initiative, launching fresh mortar attacks on Damascus on Monday night and firing rockets against a humanitarian corridor and checkpoint designated for evacuation to prevent anyone from leaving. They also reportedly launched an attack on Syrian army positions as the truce was to take effect.

The UN-affiliated Reach Initiative, which monitors humanitarian crises, has reported that the "rebels" have consistently blocked civilians, including women and children, from leaving the zones under their control. "Women of all ages, and children, reportedly continued to

be forbidden by local armed groups from leaving the area,” the aid agency said in a recent report.

While in both Mosul and Raqqa, the Pentagon and its stenographers in the US and other Western media routinely charged ISIS with using civilians as “human shields,” the phrase is never applied to eastern Ghouta, where it is clear that the Al Qaeda-linked militias are forcibly detaining civilians to serve just that function.

The denunciations of Damascus and Moscow over civilian deaths in eastern Ghouta has been joined by a series of unsubstantiated allegations of the Assad government’s use of chemical weapons against the area’s population. The first such alleged attack came immediately after the Russian government issued a warning that the “rebels” had brought chlorine and gas masks into the region with the aim of staging an incident that could then be blamed on the government, providing a motive for Western intervention.

A gas attack in the same area in 2013 brought the US to the brink of direct military intervention against the Syrian government before the Obama administration accepted a Russian-brokered agreement to secure the complete destruction of the Syrian military’s chemical stockpile. There was strong evidence that that attack had also been staged by the “rebels.”

Similarly, a chemical weapons incident in Khan Sheikhoun last April was seized upon by the Trump administration as the pretext for launching 59 cruise missiles at Syria’s Shayrat airbase. Damascus insisted that it had not carried out the attack, and indeed had no discernible motive to use such a weapon, which was certain to provoke Western retaliation.

The US, British and French governments have all issued threats to stage military attacks on Syria in the event of another chemical weapons attack. British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson reiterated this threat on Tuesday, saying that his government would carry out strikes if there was “incontrovertible evidence” of Syrian government responsibility.

Adding fuel to the fire, the *New York Times* Tuesday published a front page article titled “ U.N. Links North Korea to Syria’s Chemical Weapon Program,” which consisted of a series of unsubstantiated allegations and what amounts to propaganda for US wars against both countries.

The article echoes similar charges published in the *Times* about Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction” in the run-up to the US war of aggression in 2003. It states that an unpublished UN report has alleged trade between North Korea and Syria that could “allow Syria to maintain its chemical weapons while also providing North Korea with cash for its nuclear and missile programs.”

Having constructed this new “axis of evil,” the *Times* goes on to acknowledge that the alleged shipments involved

“materials that could be used for both military and civilian purposes” and that “Experts who viewed the report said the evidence it cited did not prove definitively that there was current, continuing collaboration between North Korea and Syria on chemical weapons.”

Joining the drumbeat for a major escalation of the US military intervention against Syria—and with it the prospect of a far more dangerous armed confrontation between US imperialism and both Iran and Russia—a group of 200 “activists” issued an open letter entitled “Stop pretending that you can’t do anything to save Syrians.”

Published by the *New York Review of Books* on Tuesday, the letter dismisses the United Nations as “ineffectual” and directly appeals to the major imperialist powers to act under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. “For the agony of the people of Syria to come to an end, it must be forcibly stopped,” the letter states.

Among the signatories are Eric Ruder, a writer for the International Socialist Organization’s *Socialist Worker* in the US, Gilbert Achcar, a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London and the principal spokesman on the Middle East for the Pabloite United Secretariat and its web site *International Viewpoint* and Michael Karadjis, a leading member of the Australian organization Socialist Alliance.

The appeal for armed action issued by these pseudo-left elements, reflecting a privileged upper middle-class layer whose interests are directly tied to imperialism, is an unmistakable warning that a major new war is being prepared.



To contact the WWSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wwsws.org/contact](https://wwsws.org/contact)**