

On the brink of war: US and NATO prepare military strike on Syria

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The United States and NATO are on the brink of a major escalation of the war in Syria, which could lead to a direct clash with nuclear-armed Russia.

Amid a wave of labor unrest throughout the United States and Europe, coupled with acute domestic political crises, the ruling elites see in war a means not only of reversing a series of geopolitical setbacks in the Middle East, but also of cracking down on political opposition.

The United States, Britain, France and Germany are all being shaken by a growing strike movement amid crisis and turmoil within the political establishment and the state. On the very day that US President Trump met with his National Security Council to decide on military action against Syria, the FBI raided the office and residences of Trump's personal lawyer, escalating the conflict raging within the American ruling class.

The potential consequences of a war against Syria are massive. Last month, Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov vowed to retaliate against any attack on Russian troops in Syria, declaring, "In the event of a threat to the lives of our servicemen, Russia's armed forces will take retaliatory measures against the missiles and launchers used."

On Monday, Gerasimov again warned, "We have to say once again that military interference in Syria...is absolutely unacceptable and can lead to very grave consequences."

Such statements underscore just how close the world is to war between nuclear-armed powers, threatening the lives of millions of people and human civilization itself.

The pretext for this escalation is the chemical weapons attack alleged by the US, without any substantiation, to have been carried out by the Syrian government. This *casus belli* is the crudest of

fabrications. What possible reason could there be for the Assad regime to stage such an attack under conditions where it has routed the US-backed Islamist rebels on the outskirts of Damascus and is in its strongest position since the early stages of the US-fomented civil war?

The media hysteria over the alleged gas attack is in line with the relentless campaign of provocations and threats against Russia—a campaign that has reached a new crescendo in recent weeks. The latest allegations take place within days of the discrediting of the claims that Russia was responsible for the supposed chemical poisoning in Salisbury, England of ex-double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter.

Trump has issued a series of tweets that proclaim the Syrian government guilty of "horrendous" crimes, charging Russia and Iran with complicity and promising that those responsible will pay a "big price."

The US media, military-intelligence apparatus and political establishment are baying for blood. Republican Senator John McCain blamed Trump's "inaction" in Syria for "emboldening" Washington's enemies. Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic Party leader in the House of Representatives, signaled her support for military action against Syria while demanding that the Trump administration "finally provide a smart, strong and consistent strategy" to overthrow the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

France and Britain have said they will join the US attack in Syria, if invited, or even mount their own strikes. The *New York Times* cited a Trump administration official as saying that Washington is feeling pressure to hasten an American attack on Syria "lest French President Emanuel Macron do so first."

Last week saw a furious dispute within the American ruling elite, including the senior-most levels of the

Trump administration, as the Pentagon, the CIA, the Democrats and much of the Republican Party leadership successfully pushed back against Trump's suggestion that US troops would soon be "coming home" from Syria. Trump was bluntly told that such a pullout would not only be to the benefit of Russia, but would also cut across Trump's plans to intensify economic and military pressure on Iran by torpedoing the Iran nuclear accord.

Vladimir Putin and the regime of capitalist oligarchs he heads have long sought an accommodation with Washington. But US imperialism, under successive administrations, has made clear that it would be satisfied only with Russia's semi-colonial subjugation.

That Moscow, in the face of NATO's expansion to its borders, US-sponsored "color revolutions" in neighboring states, and a quarter-century of US wars across North Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans and Central Asia, has intervened to disrupt Washington's plans in Ukraine and Syria is deemed by Washington and Wall Street to be intolerable.

The real causes of the United States' reckless provocations against Russia have nothing to do with "meddling" in US politics or an alleged poison gas attack.

In the quarter-century since the dissolution of the USSR, US imperialism sought to reverse the erosion of its global economic position through aggression and war. In its quest for world hegemony, the United States has razed entire countries such as Libya and Iraq. But Washington's never-ending wars have failed to reverse its decline. Instead, they have metastasized into military-strategic offensives against Russia and China and official declarations from Washington that the US is involved in a new age of great-power conflict.

The eruption of US militarism is accelerated by deepening economic crisis. In an article titled "Cracks Form in Global Growth Story, Rattling Investors," published Monday, the *Wall Street Journal* warned, "Investor confidence has flagged amid fears that a long-expected global synchronized surge may be turning into a synchronized stall."

Most importantly, the ruling elite sees war as the most expedient means of attacking democratic rights at home in order to crush the growing upsurge of the working class. On Tuesday, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg will testify before Congress amid demands

that major technology firms implement even more aggressive measures to crack down on "foreign propaganda" and "fake news." Against the backdrop of a major new military conflict, calls will be redoubled for the banning of political opposition.

But it is precisely the growing international movement of the working class that represents the antipode to imperialist war. The class struggle is more and more demonstrating the common interests of workers around the world. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting to politically arm this movement with a socialist and internationalist program linking the struggle against war to the defense of workers' social and democratic rights.



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