

US media demands full-scale assault against Syria

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Large sections of the American and international media are demanding that the Trump administration follow through on its rhetoric and launch a massive military assault against the Russian-backed Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad. The recklessness of the editorial agitation is underscored by the fact that the calls for “action” are indifferent to the possibility that an attack on Syria could provoke a war with nuclear-armed Russia.

A selection of headlines conveys the sentiment that is pervading the American establishment press. “A few cruise missiles from Trump won’t stop Syria’s war crimes” (*Washington Post*); “For a second strike on Syria, Trump will have to go big” (*Foreign Policy*); “In Syria, Trump faces the limits of bluster” (*New York Times*).

The pretext for the Trump administration ordering a major escalation of American military operations in Syria is the unverified and dubious allegation that the Syrian army used chemical weapons in an attack last weekend on the rebel-held city of Douma. Lurid video footage released by anti-government forces—which even some media outlets have felt obliged to re-publish with the disclaimer that they cannot verify its authenticity—claims to show children suffering from the effects of a chlorine-based weapon.

Both the Assad government and Russia, which has thousands of military personnel on the ground supporting Syrian forces, vehemently deny the accusations. They have pointed to the obvious issues: from any standpoint, the use of chemical weapons would be both militarily unnecessary and strategically detrimental to their interests. The US-backed Islamist forces had been utterly routed and have since surrendered Douma.

The only beneficiary of the alleged chemical attack,

as has been demonstrated throughout this week, are the factions of the ruling class in the US, Europe and internationally who want to prevent the total defeat of the “rebels” and use Moscow’s backing for the Assad government as the means to step up war preparations against Russia itself.

In April 2017, the Trump administration responded to subsequently disproven allegations that chemical weapons had been used by the Syrian government by firing 59 cruise missiles at an airbase where it was known that Russian personnel were operating. Trump later boasted that he informed Chinese President Xi Jinping of an attack that could have triggered a nuclear war while they were eating chocolate cake together at his mansion in Florida.

A year later, Trump has issued bellicose tweets and statements responding to the latest and no less fraudulent poison gas claims, vowing that the Syrian government will pay a “big price” and accusing Iran and Russia of complicity in the purported chemical attack. In the United Nations, American Ambassador Nikki Haley vowed that the US “will respond” regardless of any veto in the UN by Russia and China of military action.

The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the Democratic Party and military-intelligence apparatus for which they speak have sent a clear message to Trump that a limited attack like that in 2017 will be denounced as worse than useless. They are demanding nothing short of the overthrow of the Assad regime and, if necessary to achieve that end, the use of military force against Russian and Iranian forces in Syria.

The *Post* declared on April 11: “[T]he reality Mr. Trump has not yet faced is that as long as the dictator he called ‘Animal Assad’ remains in place, Syria’s wars will continue.”

The *Times*’ editorial stated: “Just to reiterate: have any chance of success, any international retaliatory action must be part of a coherent diplomatic strategy for stabilising Syria and putting a political settlement in place.... The conflict has allowed Russia, Iran, Turkey and the Islamic State, now degraded by an American-led coalition, to gain a foothold in Syria.”

Foreign Policy, after endorsing a massive attack, indifferently raised the question: “Whether or not such a large-scale operation will bring the United States into a confrontation with Assad’s main patron, Russia, is less clear. The answer depends in part on the severity of the US military action...”

The military means to carry out a “large-scale operation” are already in place in the Middle East, due to 25 years of US-led imperialist intrigues and wars across the region. A vast array of American aircraft is stationed in Iraq and the Gulf states. American, French and British warships and submarines armed with cruise missiles are deployed in the eastern Mediterranean.

The Macron government in France and the May government in Britain have signaled that they are prepared to enlist in a revamped “coalition of the willing” and participate in what could escalate into a war with Russia and Iran. The Saudi Arabian monarchy, armed to the teeth by US imperialism, has indicated it will participate in military action in Syria and, implicitly, a wider regional conflict. Israel, the main US client state in the region, which is suspected of having carried out a missile attack on a Syrian airbase on Monday, would also inevitably be involved.

A US Defense Department spokesperson, Eric Pahon, told *Foreign Policy*: “We’re pulling all of our plans off the shelf, but, ultimately, it’s the president’s decision. He has a lot of options he can take, and not all of them are military.”

The message being conveyed in the US media, however, is that if Trump chooses a non-military option, his already besieged administration will face an even more ferocious attack from its opponents. They will be satisfied with nothing less than war.

In the short-term, a key objective is to secure American domination over the Middle East. Longer-term, it is part of a calculated and reckless determination to cripple and ultimately bring down the Russian government of President Vladimir Putin.

Faced with the exposure of their claims that Moscow

tried to poison double-agent Sergei Skripal with a nerve agent, the ruling class elements seeking confrontation with Russia have employed the imperialist proxy forces in Syria to stage a new provocation.

Another factor in the provocations aimed at stoking tensions with Russia is the desperation of the ruling class to divert and suppress the growing movement of workers for wages, secure employment and decent social conditions.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* Perspective stressed yesterday: “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.”

Under conditions of a major military conflict, strikes and demonstrations for workers’ social and democratic rights will inevitably be denounced as “giving aid to the enemy.”



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