

US and imperialist allies launch strikes against Syria

The World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board
14 April 2018

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the strikes against Syria carried out Friday night by US, French and British forces. The attack is a flagrant and illegal act of aggression. The administrations of American President Donald Trump, French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Theresa May are guilty of a war crime, which poses the danger of triggering a conflict with nuclear-armed Russia.

The pretext for the attack on Syria is unproven allegations that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's military forces used banned chemical weapons against US-backed rebel militias in the city of Douma. Russia, which has significant military contingents in Syria to support Assad's government in its seven-year civil war against predominantly Islamist-based militias, has categorically rejected the US and allied propaganda. It has openly accused British intelligence of pressuring Syrian rebel organisations to manufacture a video that purports to show victims of a chemical weapons attack.

A team from the ostensibly independent Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was scheduled to arrive in Douma to carry out an inspection of the alleged site this weekend. Trump's order to initiate strikes was calculated to pre-empt such an inspection and a confirmation by the OPCW that the entire pretext for any attack on Syria was a lie.

The fraudulent basis for the assault was underscored shortly after Trump's broadcast, during the subsequent press briefing by his defense secretary, General Jim Mattis. Mattis could not provide any coherent details as to the US accusations. Moreover, contradicting the president's vow of a protracted campaign against Syria, the general appeared to indicate that there would be no more action apart from the missile strikes that had already taken place.

If this does prove to be the case, the action ordered by

Trump will fall far short of what was being demanded within the American political and media establishment.

Given the extreme vitriol directed against Bashar al-Assad, there is no doubt that advocates of a military strike expected that any attack would include an attempt to assassinate the Syrian president.

A column in the German journal *Die Welt* provided one indication of the homicidal nature of what large sections of the imperialist ruling class internationally want unleashed against Syria. It declared: "War against Assad should be guided by one goal... Can the Assad regime be exterminated (auslöschen) with a missile strike?" In using the term "auslöschen" to refer to the Syrian president, the German publication adopted a term associated with the extermination of the Jews under the Nazis—that is, using language that could have appeared in Hitler's *Völkischer Beobachter*.

Far from the destruction of the Assad government, however, the strike against Syria appears to have had minimal impact. The Russian military has boasted that Syrian air defenses shot down most of the missiles fired into Syria, and that none of its personnel or assets in the country were impacted. Bashar al-Assad reportedly walked to his office on Saturday morning.

At this point, the attack has served primarily to underscore the debacle facing the US-led imperialist intrigues for regime-change in Syria. It will most likely not be long before sections of the American political and media establishment are accusing Trump of a climb-down and capitulation to Vladimir Putin. Demands will inevitably be made for far more extensive, and murderous, operations.

The propaganda campaign justifying the attack on Syria was concocted to provide a pretext for a massive military onslaught—not one-off missile strikes.

Facing the prospect of a military rout of its Islamist

proxy forces fighting to overthrow the Syrian government, the decision for an escalation was made in Washington and London, and it was left to the CIA, MI6 and their Syrian agents to manufacture a pretext.

On Friday, the Russian Ministry of Defense provided the most coherent and logical account given so far regarding the incident in Douma on April 7, which the Western press has unanimously proclaimed a chemical weapons attack on civilians by the Assad government.

“We have irrefutable evidence that it was another staged attack, and the special services of a state which is in the forefront of the Russo-phobic campaign had a hand in staging it,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

The Russian Defense Ministry showed a video interview with two people, one of whom was a medical student working at Douma’s only operational hospital. The witnesses said that after a Syrian Army artillery barrage hit a building, people suffering from smoke inhalation were being treated at a hospital. Then, unknown individuals—later revealed to be associated with the CIA-backed Syrian rebel “White Helmets”—ran into the hospital screaming that there had been a chemical weapons attack. They encouraged the victims to douse each other with water, which they then proceeded to film.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Major-General Igor Konashenkov stated: “We know for certain that between April 3 and April 6 the so-called White Helmets were seriously pressured from London to speed up the provocation that they were preparing.”

RT.com reported: “According to Konashenkov, the group, which was a primary source of photos and footage of the purported chemical attack, was informed of a large-scale artillery attack on Damascus planned by the Islamist group Army of Islam, which controlled Douma at the time. The White Helmets were ordered to arrange the provocation after retaliatory strikes by the Syrian government forces, which the shelling was certain to lead to, he said.”

Despite vehemently denouncing the Russian claims, neither Washington nor London made any attempt to factually refute them. In contrast to the categorical statements of the Russian government, backed up by video testimony, Theresa May has only claimed it was “highly likely” that Syria carried out the attack. But even that was more definite than the statements of

Defense Secretary Mattis, who declared the United States was still “looking for the actual evidence.”

With the initiation of attacks on Syria, the US and its allies have signaled that the unravelling of the nominal reasons for war is irrelevant. Their onslaught is driven by far deeper causes than the lies used to justify them.

What is taking place is directly in line with the analysis of imperialism made by the great 20th century Marxists, Lenin and Trotsky. World imperialism is undertaking a new re-division of the world. Britain and France want to be recognized as full-scale participants in the new carve-up of the Middle East and its effective recolonization: their oil corporations do not want to be left out of the plunder.

All of the governments participating in this new onslaught are crisis-ridden and lack any electoral legitimacy. The vast gulf between them and their populations is expressed in the fact that none of them has been able to create any broad-based support for war. According to one YouGov poll, only 22 percent of the British population supports a military strike on Syria.

Moreover, the launching of a major new military campaign is seen in London, Paris, and Washington as a means of implementing police-state rule, including mass censorship, to prop up their crisis-ridden governments in the face of mounting popular opposition and a growing strike movement by the working class.

This new conflict will not stop with the attack on Syria, just as the expansion of war did not stop with the invasion of Iraq. The stage is being set for a confrontation with Iran, Russia and, ultimately, China. More and more, imperialist policy is acquiring a completely reckless and unhinged character.

So far, the ruling class has been able to rely on the absence of any organized resistance to war. But popular anti-war sentiment will inevitably take on active forms and meet up with rising opposition to austerity and the destruction of democratic rights.



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