

Washington revives Syria chemical weapons propaganda as pretext for war

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23 May 2019

Washington is once again threatening a military attack against Syria over the alleged use of chemical weapons by the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

If executed, this attack would be the third in as many years by the Trump administration, which rained missiles down upon the war-ravaged country in April 2017 and April 2018 using unsubstantiated allegations of chemical weapons use as a pretext.

The latest threat was issued in the form of a statement from recently appointed State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus—like her predecessor recruited from the stable of right-wing Fox News commentators. “We repeat our warning that if the Assad regime uses chemical weapons, the United States and our allies will respond quickly and appropriately,” the statement said.

The latest incident is alleged to have taken place in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib in territory that is dominated by the Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham militia, the latest incarnation of the Al Nusra Front, the Syrian affiliate of Al Qaeda. Syrian troops and allied militias backed by Russian air power have been waging a battle against the Islamist forces in recent weeks.

Washington’s concern is that if Damascus reasserts government control over the province it will signal an end to the nearly eight-year war for regime change backed by the US and both its NATO and regional allies, in particular Saudi Arabia and Israel, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and turned millions into refugees.

While the US launched a direct military intervention in Syria in 2014, carrying out devastating air strikes and sending in 2,000 troops on the pretext of combating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and prosecuting the “war on terrorism,” it is now threatening to carry out attacks aimed at rescuing the last remnants of Al Qaeda in Syria.

The pretext that Washington is worried about civilian casualties is absurd on its face. No such qualms were exhibited when US warplanes and howitzers reduced the Syrian city of Raqqa to the ground, killing thousands of men, women and children, to say nothing about the far

greater civilian death toll in a similar US siege of Mosul, once Iraq’s second largest city.

The threat of a renewed intervention in Syria has come in the context of a massive US military buildup in the Persian Gulf against Iran, the main regional ally of Damascus. The Pentagon has dispatched a carrier battle group to waters off Iran’s shores. It has been joined by a bomber task force, including nuclear-capable B-52s, together with amphibious assault warships carrying contingents of US Marines and a Patriot missile battery.

In an undisguised threat of a direct invasion, the Pentagon has drawn up war plans calling for the shipping of as many as 120,000 US troops to the region, an expeditionary force similar in size to that which was mobilized in preparation for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

What US imperialism has once again brought to the Middle East is a war in search of a pretext, either real or fabricated.

Allegations that an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia was behind an errant rocket that landed inside Baghdad’s heavily fortified Green Zone, about a third of a mile from the US embassy, have come close upon the heels of claims of Iranian responsibility for the sabotage of oil tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates. Tehran has also been blamed for drone attacks by Yemen’s Houthi rebels on Saudi facilities in retaliation for Riyadh’s near-genocidal war against the Arab world’s poorest nation.

And, of course, there remain the baseless US claims that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons that were used to justify the Trump administration’s ripping up of the 2015 Iran nuclear accord and imposing brutal economic sanctions that are tantamount to a state of war.

Having thus far failed to goad Iran into a military response to its ceaseless provocations, Washington now appears to be preparing a new front by reigniting its war against Syria.

In issuing its Tuesday threat of US retaliation over the alleged use of chemical weapons, the State Department included a warning against a “disinformation campaign by the Assad regime and Russia to create the false narrative that

others are to blame for chemical weapons attacks that the Assad regime is itself conducting.”

This passage was apparently included in large measure due to the leaking of a document prepared by a leading investigator of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which tore apart the official story regarding the alleged chemical weapon attack in the Damascus suburb of Douma that was used as the pretext for the last US, British and French missile attack in April 2018.

The report analyzed the gas cylinders that were alleged to have been dropped by Syrian government aircraft on the roof of an apartment block, supposedly causing the deaths of 49 people.

“The dimensions, characteristics and appearance of the cylinders, and the surrounding scene of the incidents, were inconsistent with what would have been expected in the case of either cylinder being delivered from an aircraft,” the report states. It adds that the manual placement of the cylinders where investigators found them is “the only plausible explanation for observations at the scene.” As the scene was under the control of Al Qaeda-linked militias, this means that they, and not the Damascus government, were responsible for the incident and the deaths.

This report, obliquely referred to by the State Department, has been studiously ignored by the corporate media. The *New York Times*, setting the pattern for the rest of the press, regurgitates at length the allegations of Ms. Ortagus, but rigorously censors the evidence that Washington’s chemical weapons claims are filthy fabrications.

There is nothing new in this. In the immediate aftermath of the April 2018 Douma incident, the well-known veteran British Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk visited the scene, interviewing doctors at a medical clinic where widely publicized videos were filmed showing children being hosed down with water, ostensibly to relieve poison gas inhalation. They told him that the scene had been staged by the Western-funded “White Helmets” and that no one had come to the clinic suffering from gas poisoning.

Fisk’s account, along with other evidence establishing the Douma incident as a fabrication staged to justify a US-led attack on Syria, was ignored by the rest of the corporate media, which functioned as a propaganda arm of the Pentagon.

There was the same reaction in 2017 to the evidence presented by veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh that an alleged chemical weapons attack on the village of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province was in fact a conventional strike against a gathering of Al Qaeda-linked militia members that the Russian military had cleared in advance with the Pentagon. Nonetheless, the Trump administration used it as a pretext for lobbing 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles

into Syria, reportedly killing nine civilians.

The Democratic Party supported both the previous missile strikes on Syria and will unquestionably back a new one. In advance of the State Department threat, Democratic congressmen and senators joined in backing a letter to Trump signed by 400 members of the two legislative bodies demanding that the White House “increase pressure on Iran and Russia with respect to activities in Syria.”

Whatever misgivings Democrats have expressed about Trump’s apocalyptic tweet threatening an “official end” to Iran, they are promoting a policy that would pit US troops in Syria against Iran and Russia, a nuclear-armed power, in continuing the illegal war for regime change.

So too, the pseudo-left—from the Democratic Socialists of America to the recently dissolved International Socialist Organization—has worked in lock-step with the Democratic Party and the US military and intelligence apparatus. They seek to create an ostensibly liberal constituency for war among privileged layers of the middle class with invocations of “human rights” and an attempt to sell the CIA war for regime change as some kind of “democratic revolution”.

Their politics are a “left” expression of the relentless drive by US imperialism to overcome the decline of its global hegemony by military means. In particular, this has taken the form of an attempt to assert its unfettered domination of the world’s oil fields, from Iran to Venezuela, placing itself in control of resources required by its principal global rival, China.

The threats against Syria together with the buildup for war against Iran pose the danger of a third world war. However, the same crisis of US and world capitalism that gives rise to this danger is producing its opposite, the growth of the class struggle and the maturing of the objective conditions for socialist revolution. The most urgent task is the development of a mass political movement of the working class in opposition to war and its source, the capitalist system.



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