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Cruise Missile Attacks: A New Step in Washington's Long Class War on Syria

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Washington has added a new dimension to its long war on Syria: direct military intervention.

Since the mid 1950s, the United States has tried to purge Damascus of an Arab nationalist leadership which has zealously guarded Syria's freedom from US domination and follows an Arab socialist development path which is at odds with the global free enterprise project advanced by Washington on behalf of its Wall Street patron.

Until now, Washington has refrained from directly attacking Syrian forces, though it has intervened *manu militari* in Syria to hold the Islamic State in check so that the militant group remains strong enough to weaken Syrian forces but not so strong that it captures the Syrian state. [1]

This limited Islamic State-directed US intervention in Syria has involved both airstrikes and an estimated 1,000 boots on the ground. [2] However, the principal *modus operandi* of Washington's long war on Syria has been war waged through proxies, both Israel, which annexed Syria's Golan Heights and has carried out innumerable small-scale attacks since, and Islamist guerrillas, who, from the 1960s, have waged a jihad against what they view as Syria's heretical government. [3]

The United States contemplated direct military intervention in Syria in 2003, as a follow-up to its invasion of neighbouring Iraq, but found that its resources were strained by efforts to pacify Afghanistan and Iraq and that other means of regime change would have to be pursued. [4]

In place of a muscular boots on the ground strategy, Washington imposed an economic blockade in 2003, which, by 2012, had caused Syria's economy to buckle, according to the New York Times. [5]

By the spring of 2012, sanctions-induced financial haemorrhaging had “forced Syrian officials to stop providing education, health care and other essential services in some parts of the country.” [6]

By 2016, “US and EU economic sanctions on Syria” were “causing huge suffering among ordinary Syrians and preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid, according to a leaked UN internal report.” [7] The report revealed that aid agencies were unable to obtain drugs and equipment for hospitals because sanctions prevented foreign firms from conducting commerce with Syria.

Veteran foreign correspondent **Patrick Cockburn** wrote that “the US and EU sanctions” resembled the Iraqi sanctions regime, and were “an economic siege on Syria”—a siege it might be recalled that led to the deaths of more than 500,000 Iraqi children, according to the UN, a death toll greater than that produced by all the weapons of mass destruction in history. [8] Cockburn surmised that the Syrian siege was killing numberless people through illness and malnutrition. [9]

On top of its merciless campaign of economic warfare, Washington enlisted the Arab nationalists' longstanding foe, the Muslim Brotherhood, to provoke a civil revolt in Syria. The revolt, inaugurated by Islamist-instigated riots in Daraa in mid-March 2011, soon mushroomed into an all-out campaign of guerrilla warfare, fueled by Saudi, Qatari, Turkish, Jordanian and US money. U.S. and Western intelligence services trained thousands of guerrillas in Jordan and Qatar. [10]

In 2012, the US Defense Intelligence Agency reported that the insurgency was Islamist, led by the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Islamic State's forerunner, and that Western powers and the kings, emirs and sultans who preside tyrannically over Gulf oil states, were the backers. According to the intelligence agency, Turkey's **Recep Tayyip Erdogan**, a man infatuated with dreams of becoming a neo-Ottoman sultan, and himself an Islamist, was also a major backer. [11]

But until Washington ordered cruise missiles to rain down on Shayrat Airfield near Homs on April 6, the United States had relied on proxies and siege to bring about regime change in a country which **Moshe Ma'oz** had termed “a focus of Arab nationalistic struggle against an American regional presence and interests.” [12]

The Shayrat Airfield attack was presented for world opinion as a response to Syrian forces allegedly gassing civilians at Khan Shaykum on 4 April. The allegations were levelled by blatantly partisan sources.

One source was the White Helmets, which bills itself as a neutral civil defense outfit, but is in reality funded by governments entangled with Washington in its long war on Syria. It is enmeshed, too, or at the very least, cooperates with, al-Qaeda. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a one-person outfit based in the UK which overtly supports the guerrillas, was another source.

Significantly, no one even remotely impartial has investigated the allegations to determine whether (a) chemical agents were indeed used, (b) whether they were used deliberately, and (c) who used them? The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons refuses to weigh in on any of these questions until an investigation has been completed, the only sound course of action.

All the same, Washington and its lickspittle allies, exuding colonial arrogance, immediately pronounced in Olympian fashion that the accusations were beyond dispute, an outcome which was hardly surprising given that the Western champions of neo-colonialism share with the White Helmets and Syrian Observatory for Human Rights a common goal of overthrowing Syria's Arab nationalist government. Washington can always be counted on to publicize any calumny against its Syrian enemy, no matter how untenable.

Despite assurances that a gas attack had been undertaken at Khan Shaykum on 4 April, and that Syrian forces were responsible, the United States, France and Britain, if they, were not themselves implicated, could have had no certain knowledge of this, since these matters take weeks of on the ground investigation to offer sound judgment, and even then the question of attribution—that is, who did it?—is often unanswerable. The reality, of course, is that Western powers have no idea whether the accusation is valid but seized the opportunity to claim it was to establish a pretext for military action in furtherance of the United States' long war on Syria.

Mainstream journalists also rushed to judgement in advance of even the barest resemblance of an impartial investigation, their assessments aligning with the assessments, *sans* evidence, of their own governments.

On top of being predicated on an untested allegation by unquestionably partial sources, the US attack was illegal—and on two levels: internationally, because it was undertaken without UN Security Council assent, and domestically, because it represented an unauthorized act of war. The act of war was ordered unilaterally by the White House, notwithstanding the fact that declarations of war are the exclusive remit of Congress, which did not confer—indeed, was not asked for—its authorization.

But the point is academic.

The United States has already amassed a sizable record of crimes in Syria, and an even more sizeable record in the larger Arab world, not the least of which crimes is the intrusion of US military personnel on Syrian soil, an act of war itself.

As a military colossus, the United States is at liberty to violate international law with impunity, since there exists no higher authority capable of enforcing international law through the threat of a force greater than that which the Pentagon itself can wield. Expecting the United States to yield to international law is naïve and therefore any discussion of whether this or that act of the United States violates international law is a discussion of no consequence.

The White House is able to violate US law without punishment by eliciting at least the passive acceptance of the US public and its representatives for its wars of aggression; accordingly, with the Congress and the US public on side, there's no one to hold the White House to account before the US constitution.

White House efforts to secure the acquiescence of the public, if not its jingoistic support, are facilitated by the measures the Pentagon takes to limit US troop casualties, so that no matter how devastating US military operations are for the victims, the US public is not inconvenienced or traumatized psychologically by an accumulation of US combat casualties.

Equally helpful from the point of view of mobilizing support for war in violation of US law is the demonization of Washington's targets, an activity in which the news media, which accept the pronouncements of US officials on foreign policy at face value, engage with enthusiasm. Witness how easily the **Bush** administration and **Blair** government were able to dupe the Western mainstream media into believing (or if they weren't duped, to ardently propagate) fairy tales about Arab nationalist Iraq concealing chemical and biological weapons.

Moreover, witness how easily Washington shapes the intellectual environment. It has persuaded the world that chemical and biological weapons (which can kill tens or at most hundreds of people under ideal conditions, and many fewer under typical ones) belong to the same class of weapons as nuclear arms (which can kill tens or hundreds of thousands.) This false conflation of minor weapons with authentic weapons of mass destruction has proved useful in portraying such military non-threats as Arab nationalist Iraq under Saddam as signal threats whose elimination is imperative for the safety of the world.

Demonizing targets—often by accusing them of having, using, or intending to use either falsely classified or genuine weapons of mass destruction—creates, from the vantage point of the public, a moral obligation for the United States to act. The Leftists who have an insatiable appetite for moral lapidation and florid language about “murderous regimes,” brutal dictators,” and “moral disgrace,” in connection with the leaders of former colonies which the United States is endeavouring to re-colonize, contribute to the mobilization of consent for war and to an international class struggle from above.

Left collaborators see only the completely powerless as occupying morally tenable ground. Any state which pursues emancipatory goals is denounced as brutal, murderous, or a moral disgrace and arguments are mounted that the state's emancipatory goals are a sham. Only people without

formal power, by this way of thinking, engage in class struggle against oppression and exploitation, while those who exercise formal authority are viewed as agents of oppression by definition.

This view is too simple.



The Italian philosopher **Domenic Losurdo** argues for a tripartite model of class struggle linked to the division of labour on (1) an international level, (2) a national level and (3) within the household. [13]

Class struggle on an international level corresponds to the exploitation of the people of one nation by another nation; for example, by the relegation of one country by another to a subordinate role in the international division of labour.

Class struggle on a national level corresponds to the exploitation of labour by the owners of capital within a country, while class struggle within the household pertains to the exploitation of female domestic labour by males.

Class struggle so conceived can be coterminous as when, for example, the people in one country are exploited *en masse* as a source of labour by the owners of capital of a second.

Washington's long—and now expanded—war on Syria, is a class struggle on an international level. It is a class struggle in which the United States, as champion of the profit-making interests of corporate America and the class of billionaires who lead it, seeks to permanently relegate Syrians to a subordinate role in the international division of labour, one in which they will be limited to low wage jobs in extractive and basic manufacturing industries, if not subsistence farming.

Washington aspires to sweep away the Arab socialist impediments to the free enterprise, free trade, and free market capitalist nirvana it seeks to establish on a global scale, where US corporations have space to dominate the commanding heights of every country's economy, and local labour is relegated to low-wage roles, and permanent penury.

Former chief economist of the World Bank **Joseph Stiglitz** put it this way:

Colonialism left a mixed legacy in the developing world—but one clear result was the view among people there that they had been cruelly exploited...the political independence that came to scores of colonies after World War II did not put an end to economic colonialism. In some regions...the exploitation—the extraction of natural resources and the rape of the environment all in return for a pittance—was obvious. Elsewhere it was more subtle. In many parts of the world, global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank came to be seen as instruments of post-colonial control. These institutions pushed market fundamentalism...a notion idealized by Americans as ‘free and unfettered market.’ ... Free-market ideology turned out to be an excuse for new forms of exploitation. [14]

Arab nationalists in Iraq and Libya waged a class war on an international scale, aiming to free the people of their countries from the disadvantages that colonialism had visited upon them and to end their continued economic exploitation by the West. Their struggle, while successful for a time, ultimately ended in failure, as the United States and its allies, through demonization, siege and warfare, overcame these struggles from below. These victories by Washington were victories in favor of exploitation.

The class struggle fought by Arab nationalists in Syria continues, despite the concerted efforts of Washington, its neo-colonial allies, its Arab satraps, apartheid Israel, and Leftist collaborators, to crush it. Concurrently, the Islamic Republic of Iran is conducting its own class struggle against Western efforts of re-colonization, though on a grander scale, with the larger Islamic world as the object of liberation.

The struggle between Iran and the United States is a class struggle on a colossal scale, with Washington seeking to open Iran while keeping the remainder of the Muslim world open to continued exploitation by US financial, industrial, commercial and petrochemical concerns, and Tehran leading a project to build “resistance” economies that prioritize the uplift of the people who live and work in the Muslim world over shareholders of US corporations. This struggle is intertwined with the class struggle at which Syria is the center.

Washington’s expanded war on Syria is, then, an expanded class war from above against an emancipatory struggle from below. Washington’s war-making relies on multiple weapons, from siege, to proxy war, to direct military intervention, and no less to information warfare aimed at demonizing Syria’s Arab nationalists.

NOTES

1. See my Washington’s Long War on Syria. Baraka Books. 2017, chapter 4.
2. Thomas Walkom, “Putting Donald Trump’s strike against Syria in context,” The Toronto Star, April 7, 2017.
3. Washington’s Long War, chapter 2.
4. Ibid.
5. Nada Bakri, “Sanctions pose growing threat to Syria’s Assad”, The York Times, October 10, 2011.
6. Joby Warrick and Alice Fordham, “Syria running out of cash as sanctions take toll, but Assad avoids economic pain,” The Washington Post, April 24, 2012.

7. Patrick Cockburn, "US and EU sanctions are ruining ordinary Syrians' lives, yet Bashar al-Assad hangs on to power," *The Independent*, October 7, 2016.
8. John Mueller and Karl Mueller, "Sanctions of Mass Destruction," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 1999.
9. *60 Minutes*, May 12, 1996; Patrick Cockburn, "US and EU sanctions are ruining ordinary Syrians' lives, yet Bashar al-Assad hangs on to power," *The Independent*, October 7, 2016.
10. *Washington's Long War*, chapters 2, 3 and 4.
11. <http://www.judicialwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pg.-291-Pgs.-287-293-JW-v-DOD-and-State-14-812-DOD-Release-2015-04-10-final-version11.pdf>
12. Moshe Ma'oz, Bruce Cumings, Ervand Abrahamian and Moshe Ma'oz, *Inventing the Axis of Evil: The Truth about North Korea, Iran, and Syria*, The New Press, 2004, p .207.
13. Domenico Losurdo. *Class Struggle: A Political and Philosophical History*. Palgrave MacMillan. 2006.
14. Quoted in Graham E. Fuller. *A World without Islam*. Back Bay Books. 2010. p. 262.