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Why the United States is waging war against Syria

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In the wake of the alleged chemical weapons attack last week, the US and its European allies are moving rapidly to launch a war against Syria. Missile strikes to bombard the country into submission could begin within days. The propaganda campaign coming from the media, aimed at packaging another unpopular war for the public, has shifted into high gear.

The official reasons given for the imminent attack are a pack of unsubstantiated lies, a collection of pretexts aimed at justifying a policy that was planned long in advance.

The real reasons for this latest war can be understood only within the context of the geopolitical, economic and social crisis of American and European capitalism, and the world imperialist system as a whole.

First: From a geopolitical standpoint, the long-planned war against Syria is yet another step in Washington's campaign, since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, to secure its global dominance through military force. Confronted with the protracted decay in its once-dominant position in the world economy, the United States sees in its military power the means of establishing a hegemonic position. As early as 1992, the Pentagon's Defense Planning Guidance stated that US policy aimed to prevent the emergence of any power that could become a peer

competitor of the United States. In 2002, the US National Security Strategy stated that the United States would use pre-emptive war to achieve this aim.

A central feature of the global explosion of US militarism is Washington's drive to secure a dominant position not only in the Middle East, but on the entire Eurasian land mass. In recent years, the writings of the late 19th and early 20th century imperialist strategist Sir Halford Mackinder have once again become essential texts for the policymakers in the State Department, Pentagon and CIA. In numerous books and countless articles published in academic journals, what Mackinder called the "world-island"—stretching from the eastern borders of Germany to the western border of China—is deemed to be of decisive strategic importance to the United States and its West European allies.

As one recent study asserts, "The Eurasian landmass ought to be the focal point of the West's strategic exertions... If the nascent process of Western decline is to be arrested and reversed, a better understanding of the geopolitical relevance of Eurasia, and the struggle therein, and a concerted effort there, is crucial." [*The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West*, by Alexandros Petersen] As with all imperialist strategies for world domination, this entails a struggle against powers that are seen as obstacles to its realization. The drive to dominate Eurasia leads inevitably to escalating conflict with Russia and China.

The series of aggressive wars conducted by the United States since the 1990s—in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia—is part of an agenda that envisions the unchallengeable global dominance of the United States. The fact that world domination cannot be achieved without wars that will cost hundreds of millions of lives, and, very possibly, the destruction of the planet, will not deter Washington from plunging ahead.

This strategy of imperialist conquest may be insane, but so was that of Adolf Hitler—whose geopolitical objectives appear almost provincial in scope, when compared to the ambitions of US imperialism. As Trotsky, foreseeing the evolution of American imperialism, wrote nearly 80 years ago: "For Germany, it was a question of 'organizing Europe.' The United States must 'organize' the world."

As for the European powers, *for now* they see their own imperialist ambitions as best served by tying their fortunes to the Pentagon. They hope they can share in the plunder of US wars and, in the process, legitimize their own looting operations, such as France's wars in Africa.

Second: Economically, world capitalism is in the fifth year of its deepest crisis since the Great Depression, producing economic stagnation, mass unemployment, and a relentless collapse of living standards. The ever more desperate economic situation—with deepening debts, debased currencies, and intensifying international competition—drives ever more reckless and violent foreign policies.

The Great Depression of the 1930s led to World War II, as the imperialist powers sought to find in war a solution to the maladies of capitalism. The Great Recession that began in 2008, which shows no signs of abating, is leading to World War III. The forms of economic parasitism associated with the processes of global financialization—in which the enrichment of a small stratum of society is achieved through swindling on a massive scale—finds its natural complement in a foreign policy that realizes its objectives through criminal violence.

Significantly, the United States is sweeping aside the United Nations and proceeding to war without the approval of the UN Security Council, where Russia and China have veto power, much as the League of Nations collapsed after fascist Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935.

Third: All the imperialist countries confront an ever-worsening social crisis produced by rising social inequality and class tensions. In the United States—where the wealthiest 10 percent of the population owns nearly three quarters of the wealth, and the top 1 percent monopolizes half of that—cities are being forced into bankruptcy amid a relentless assault on wages and living standards.

In Europe, the European Union is disintegrating amid rising tensions between the European powers and an assault on jobs and living standards symbolized by the social devastation of Greece. The more bitter and intractable the conflicts between the major European powers, the more they turn to external aggression as the only policy upon which they can all agree.

The imperialist powers increasingly see war as a means to distract attention from the exposure of their criminal operations directed against the people. The timing of the current war is clearly related to the political crisis provoked by Edward Snowden's revelations of mass, illegal spying by intelligence agencies against the populations of the United States and the major European powers. Imperialist militarism is seen by the ruling elite as an essential means of directing social tensions outward, along the useless and destructive channels of war.

But the twentieth century teaches that the ruling classes that hoped to extricate themselves from the bankruptcy of capitalism by winning big at the roulette table of militarism, eventually discovered that the odds of history were against them and they had made some very bad bets.

The Syrian war, like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, will produce death and suffering on a massive scale, intensify the world economic and political crisis, and bring mankind as a whole closer to catastrophe.

The launching of war against yet another small country testifies not only to the brutality, but also the bankruptcy of American and European capitalism and the entire world system based on exploitation and plunder. The only way out of the bloody dead end of capitalism and imperialism is through the united struggle of the international working class for the victory of the World Socialist Revolution.

