

Growing calls for attack on Syria follow chemical weapons claims

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The report of a chemical weapons attack in the eastern suburbs of Damascus has been seized upon by the Western powers and their regional allies as the pretext to push for direct military intervention.

Government denunciations combined with massive media coverage indicting the government of President Bashar al-Assad—before there has been any independent confirmation of the nature of the attack or a shred of evidence linking it to the regime—all point to a filthy, stage-managed provocation.

France, Syria's former colonial oppressor, has taken the lead in this campaign, much as it did in the 2011 war for regime change in Libya.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius Thursday declared that in response to the incident in Syria, “we need a reaction by the international community.... a reaction of (military) force.” While ruling out the deployment of French troops on the ground in Syria, he insisted on “a reaction that can take a form, I don't want to be more precise, of force.”

Similarly, Turkey's Islamist government, which has provided Al-Qaeda-affiliated gangs operating inside Syria with bases, arms and logistical support, pushed for a military response. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu declared Thursday that “all red lines” had been crossed in Syria, employing the phrase used by US President Barack Obama when he threatened US military action if the Syrian government used chemical weapons.

And Israel, which has warmed its hands over the civil war in Syria while continuing to occupy Syria's Golan Heights, chided the Western powers for not carrying out direct military strikes.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu argued that aggression against Syria was necessary as a prelude to confronting Iran. “Syria has become Iran's testing

ground, and Iran is closely watching whether and how the world responds,” he said in a statement.

The Obama administration has thus far limited itself to demands that the Assad regime allow UN inspectors access to the site of the alleged chemical attack “without any interference or manipulation from the Syrian Government.” The fact that US-backed armed militias, including Al-Qaeda-linked elements, control the site and not the Syrian government is a matter of indifference to both Western governments and media that have echoed this demand.

Other elements within the US ruling establishment, however, have seized on the incident to demand military action. Arizona Republican Senator John McCain slammed Obama's failure to act on his “red line,” declaring: “The word of the president of the United States can no longer be taken seriously.”

McCain argued that US attacks could destroy Syria's air force within a “couple of days,” advocating a “no fly zone” and the provision of “the right kind of weapons” to the so-called rebels.

The demands for military intervention have been amplified by the breathless reports of American television, with faithful conduits for the CIA and the Pentagon like ABC News's chief foreign affairs correspondent Martha Raddatz reporting the allegations made by the Western-backed opposition as fact.

This has been accompanied by the broadcasting of images from YouTube videos posted by the “rebels” showing shrouded bodies and people being treated in medical facilities. Television announcers have given solemn warnings to viewers about the “disturbing images.”

Yet the same media showed little or no interest in presenting similar “disturbing images” from the slaughter of up to 2,000 unarmed demonstrators in

Egypt over the past week. The begrudging coverage of these massacres reflects the interests and policies of the US government and ruling establishment, which have continued aid and support to the blood-soaked junta in Cairo, even as they threaten military action against Syria.

Absent from all of this reporting—and from the fulminations of various Western officials—is any critical consideration of why the Syrian government would carry out such an attack in the first place.

The alleged chemical attack came precisely on the first day that a United Nations chemical weapons inspection team invited into Syria by the Assad government was to begin its work. Is this a likely moment to carry out—just 10 miles from Damascus—what is being reported as the biggest chemical weapons attack internationally in decades?

Why would the Damascus regime resort to such weapons, under conditions where it is widely reported to be making steady military advances against the Western-backed Islamist militias? And why, if it were to carry out such an attack, would it not send its forces afterwards to take control of the area, but instead leave it in the hands of the “rebels” so that they could record the scene and post images of the victims on the Internet?

Among the many images that have been made available is one of the rocket that supposedly carried the chemical weapon, a patently homemade device that bears no resemblance to the munitions that Iran and Russia have supplied to the Syrian military.

While the Assad regime has nothing to gain from carrying out such an attack, and a great deal to lose, this is not the case for the Free Syrian Army and the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front, which have become increasingly desperate in the face of advances by the Syrian military, stiff resistance from Kurdish fighters in northeastern Syria and growing popular hostility to the sectarian atrocities of these Western-backed “rebels.”

That these forces have the capability to carry out such attacks is indisputable. They themselves have publicly bragged about access to chemical weapons, and the Turkish media reported the arrest of several of their members last May in possession of the nerve agent sarin. The far-right cutthroats of Al Nusra and other Al Qaeda-linked elements would have no compunction about carrying out such a mass slaughter in order to

blame it on the regime and provoke US-NATO intervention.

When Carla Del Ponte, a leading member of the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria, reported last May that there was “strong, concrete” evidence that sarin had been used by the Western-backed forces, Washington and its European allies simply ignored these findings. Such crimes are viewed as necessary in the prosecution of a vicious war for regime change that these powers have provoked and sustained.



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