

Syria missile attacks: Trump's military adventurism under way (and its implications)

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The Assad government's April 4 chemical weapon attack on the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun, which killed more than 100 people, once again demonstrated the barbarism of that regime, responsible for countless deaths, sadistic torture and the destruction of much of the country. But it is unlikely that compassion for the victims of another brutal Assad attack was in the forefront of Donald Trump's mind when he ordered the cruise missile attack on the Syrian airbase near Homs.

As was absolutely predictable, Trump was playing the military card, making a move likely to get wide political support in the US, after weeks of being on the defensive and thrown back over the travel ban and the failed attempt to remove medical insurance from 25 million people through ditching Obamacare.

This is unlikely to be a one-off event. Indeed military aggression is likely to be a major, and immensely dangerous, feature of the Trump presidency which massively boosts the chances of a major war. Any one of the threats against China, North Korea and Iran being made by the Trump team have the potential to end in a military clash.

A number of recent developments confirmed predictions of intensified American militarism. These include the US carpet bombing of the Iraqi town of Mosul, killing hundreds of civilians in an attack ostensibly aimed at Isis; the sending of 500 more US soldiers to Iraq; more determined intervention in northern Syria; and the botched raid in Yemen that killed dozens of civilians.

But most symbolic is the increase of the defence budget by a stunning 54 billion dollars - which will include a total upgrade of nuclear weapons by 2020 - and of course the threats against China, Iran and North Korea. These have included the bizarre threats to exclude China from its bases on the Spratly islands in the South China Sea and the not very veiled threats to take military action against North Korea's nuclear facilities. This is in a context where Trump has been open about his view that nuclear weapons are 'useable' weapons.

Social care, health care, education and other government spending in the US is going to be slashed in a drive to further strengthen and modernise America's baroque arsenal of 7000 nuclear weapons, enough to destroy the world several times over, and bring on stream a vast array of new weapons, from death lasers to even more high tech rifles for the Marine Corps.

As William D. Hartung explained in *Forbes magazine*, "For the Defence Industry, Trump's Win Means Happy Days Are Here Again." He makes the latter point clear by citing a speech Trump gave before the election in which he called for tens of thousands of additional troops, a Navy of 350 ships, a significantly larger Air Force, an anti-missile, space-based Star Wars-style program of Reaganesque proportions, and an acceleration of the Pentagon's \$1 trillion 'modernisation' programme for the nuclear arsenal, which together could add more than \$900 billion to the Pentagon's budget over the next decade.

Trump lost the popular vote in the November presidential election and has been the focus of a

torrent of political hostility in the US and internationally. The obvious riposte, likely to become a recurring theme in the next few years is the beefing up of nationalist patriotism and militarism. This is the key way to turn the tables on the Democrats, who will not mount any determined opposition to militarism.

As Trump's voters find him out on jobs and prosperity, the temptation to play the military card will be overwhelming and almost certainly long-lasting. Radicals in the United States face a prolonged fight to rebuild anti-war sentiment and action. This will be a difficult task because patriotism and support for the military are so deeply engrained in American culture.

Militarism is not a mere policy option or additional item in the Trump repertoire. It is a central plank of his attempted political hegemony and a key factor in the building of a more authoritarian state. Some left wing commentators said in the US presidential election campaign that Trump was no different to Hilary Clinton on the military front, she is also a military hawk, and maybe even worse than Trump - a view that overplayed Trump's apparent opening to Putin and Russia.

In fact Trump represents a major deepening of the trend, most marked since 2001, towards the increased normalisation of violence - especially racist violence - in US society. The Pentagon spends up to \$10million a year on military displays at sports events and others major gathering. Lauding the US military is normal in movies, TV shows and video games. The defence industry and military employ millions and millions more are dependent on them. Militarism and violence are more and more normalised in US society. As Ulrich Beck puts it, "the distinctions between war and peace, military and police, war and crime, internal and external security" have collapsed in the authoritarian warfare state [\[1\]](#).

Gun culture, racist violence, the mass incarceration of Black people, the routine repression of protest and the semi-militarisation of the police, mass surveillance and external aggression are part of one single process - the deepening of the trend towards the creation of a militarist authoritarian state. Trump is the apex of the increasingly intolerant and authoritarian culture of the US right, committed to destroying free speech, civil rights, women's reproductive rights, and all vestiges of economic justice and democracy.

The possibility of the use of nuclear weapons is greater now than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. A military clash with North Korea will be extremely dangerous. Even without either side using nuclear weapons, North Korea has the ability to shower Seoul and Tokyo with non-nuclear rockets and 20 million South Koreans live within range of hundreds of North Korean artillery weapons. China cannot accept a united Korea under US hegemony, which would bring the US military to the Chinese border - the threat of which led to the intervention of a million Chinese troops in the Korean War in late 1950. The fight against militarism and war is bound to be a major preoccupation of the international left in the coming period.

In the last year of his life Martin Luther King began to draw the links between the Vietnam War, white supremacy and racism and mass poverty - as shown in the movie 'I Am Not Your Negro'. In other words he started to criticise American capitalism, almost certainly the reason for his assassination. The contemporary left also needs to draw the links, especially by upping its activity on the nuclear threat.

To make its activity credible and effective the Left must not just condemn intervention by the US and other Western powers, but also the barbarism of the Assad regime and the war crimes committed by Putin's Russia in their bombing of civilians in Aleppo and elsewhere.

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P.S.

* "Syria missile attacks: Trump's military adventurism under way":
<http://leftunity.org/syria-missile-attacks-trumps-military-adventurism-under-way/>

Footnotes

[1] The Silence of Words and Political Dynamics in the World Risk Society, *Logos* issue 1.4., Fall 2002.