

Debunking Trump's Casus Belli

Intelligence community insiders are getting restless for a whistleblower to step forward.

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Wars and rumors of wars have been dominating news cycles of late. No one should be surprised that there is a "former intelligence officer" subculture that is particularly noticeable in the Washington, DC, area. We stay in touch, communicate regularly, have lunches to discuss the "old days," and sometimes organize to raise objections to some of the foreign follies pursued by the U.S. government. Though we often try to stay under the radar, making personal but discreet contact with sympathetic congressmen and journalists, we sometimes work together to get letters to the editor or articles placed in national publications. More rarely we appear on television or radio to discuss our own perspectives on current events.

There is an additional element that helps shape our perceptions—namely, that many of us are in contact with friends who are still in harness with the Intelligence Community or who are working as post-retirement contractors. Though current employees generally are highly cautious about what they are doing, and we are acutely aware that it is not a good idea to ask anything specific, frustration over specific governmental policies and actions is occasionally vented.

Recently, with the cruise missile attacks on a Syrian airfield, there has been a considerable loosening of the normal restraints that employees exercise regarding their duties. Even more than the invasion of Iraq, which was viewed skeptically by many in the community, the decision by President Trump to retaliate with force against Damascus has been met with dismay among many of those closest to the action in the Middle East.

Many officers have expressed frustration and anger over what has taken place—not to challenge national-security policy, which they leave up to the politicians, but because they are perceiving a tissue of lies, as in Iraq. They have expressed their concerns in very specific ways to former fellow officers and friends. For the first time, people on the inside of the process are really talking. And we have been listening, astonished at the level of anger.

The insiders note that no evidence has been produced to demonstrate convincingly that Syrian forces dropped a chemical bomb on a civilian area. U.S. monitors, who had been warned by the Russians that an attack was coming, believe they saw from satellite images something close to the Russian account of events, with a bomb hitting the targeted warehouse, which then produced a cloud of gas. They also note that Syria had absolutely no motive for staging a chemical attack. In fact, it was quite the contrary, as Washington had earlier that week backed off from the U.S. position that President Bashar al-Assad should be

removed from office. The so-called rebels, however, had plenty of motive. Many intelligence officials have concluded that the White House is lying and concealing what it knows.

Some employees have even expressed a desire that a whistleblower might step forward to demolish the administration's *casus belli*, though none has yet offered to do so. Most of all, those on the ground are alarmed over ongoing preparations for expanding the war, including seemingly active plans to establish no-fly zones and safe havens. The uncompromising demand that al-Assad must go will lead, in their opinion, to a rapid escalation of military activity that inevitably will result in conflict with Russia.

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