

Imperialism and the Houla massacre

By [Alex Lantier](#)

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Investigations of the May 25 massacre in Houla, Syria have shattered the lies Washington and its allies are using to justify their escalating military intervention in Syria.

Responsibility for the deaths of 108 people massacred in Houla lies not with the Syrian army, but with the Syrian “rebel” forces the US is arming against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, according to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, a leading German daily. The newspaper reported that the Syrian guerilla groups functioned as Sunni sectarian death squads, wiping out much of Houla’s Shiite Muslim minority. Its sources were not drawn from the Assad regime, but from the Syrian opposition itself, as well as from French religious groups in Syria.

The implications of this revelation go far beyond the atrocity in Houla. They undermine the rotten foundations of the US-led campaign for war with Syria. The media uncritically reports opposition accounts of the killings and Western denunciations of Assad to cynically present arms support for the opposition—or, possibly, a US invasion of Syria—as acts of conscience to halt a humanitarian disaster.

Media outlets carrying such reports are acting as nothing more than propaganda agencies for US intervention. The US and its allies aim to intimidate Russia and China into abandoning their opposition to US-led intervention, then oust Assad and replace him with a pro-US proxy regime.

The Houla massacre was an integral part of this campaign. Less than ten days before, it had been announced that the US was coordinating a surge in weapons supplies delivered to Syrian opposition forces, paid by the Saudi and Qatari monarchies. After initial reports of the massacre, the Western powers broke off relations with Syria. The United States, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia and Canada all expelled their Syrian ambassadors in protest against a massacre actually carried out by their own proxies.

These events underscore the hypocrisy of US diplomats’ criticisms of Russia for arming the Assad regime, while Washington’s wealthy Arab allies flood “rebel” guerrillas with weapons.

None of these events can be understood outside the political crisis provoked by last year’s revolutionary upsurge in the Middle East. Mass protests of workers and youth forced out pro-US dictators in Egypt and Tunisia. However, the lack of a politically independent movement of the working class fighting to take power and fight for socialism gave the US and its allies time to regroup and elaborate a counterrevolutionary strategy.

The aim of the imperialist powers has been to further the colonial re-subjugation of the entire Middle East. Protests against pro-US regimes were to be crushed. As for protests in

countries without close ties to Washington, like Libya or Syria, they were to be brought under the control of right-wing forces and diverted along ethnic or sectarian lines. These forces would then serve as proxies in US-led civil wars, while Washington posed as a friend of the “Arab spring” because it sought to depose Middle East regimes.

After the Saudi monarchy bloodily suppressed protests in Bahrain, the US promoted Islamist and tribal elements against Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who was toppled by NATO and Islamist “rebels” in a bloody war costing some 50,000 lives. In Syria, the US relied largely on Sunni elements like the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, financed by the anti-Shiite Saudi monarchy. The massacre in Houla is the predictable outcome of Washington’s promotion of these reactionary forces.

The imperialist strategy relied on the bankruptcy of Middle Eastern bourgeois nationalist regimes and their right-wing evolution, which accelerated after the fall of the USSR. Deprived of a great power defender and deeply unpopular due to their free market reforms, they were beset with deep ethnic and sectarian divisions and vulnerable to US intervention. The Assad regime, which has carried out repeated “liberalization” programs and draws its ruling personnel from the Alawite religious minority, was particularly vulnerable.

Working off a playbook developed in the post-Soviet era wars in Yugoslavia and Iraq, the US stoked up sectarian and tribal rivalries, using the outbreak of fighting as a pretext for intervention and vastly exaggerating or manufacturing atrocities blamed on the targeted regime.

Above all, Washington relied on the subservience of the American and European media, and the dishonest parties of the bourgeois “left.” The media, having first cynically parroted the line of Syrian “rebel” forces who carried out the Houla massacre, is now ignoring the FAZ report.

Shortly after the Houla massacre, the *New York Times* published an editorial titled “Assad, the Butcher.” The newspaper cynically accused Moscow and Beijing of having blood on their hands for refusing to support a US-led military intervention.

As for the petty-bourgeois ex-left parties that have promoted Syrian “rebel” forces, such as France’s New Anti-capitalist Party and the American International Socialist Organization, they stand exposed as supporters of imperialist killings in humanitarian guise.

The only way forward in the Middle East is a renewed struggle of the working class against the capitalist regimes and for socialism, taking as its point of departure uncompromising opposition to imperialism and all its agents in the Middle East. The key allies of the Middle Eastern working class in this struggle is the working class in the imperialist countries, which is being made to pay for the economic crisis and is hostile to a new war drive by the US and Europe.

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