

Midnight Approaching over Syria?

By [Eresh Omar Jamal](#)

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To the elation of the western corporate media, Neocons like John McCain and Democons like Hillary Clinton – who had only just called for Trump to attack Syria 24 hours before he obliged – the US President unilaterally ordered the US Army, on April 6, to launch 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles at the Syrian military airfield in Ash Sha'irat near Homs. And managed to appease the entire 'establishment' he promised to oppose during his presidential campaign — that so vehemently attacked him for everything he did during his short time in the White House, previous to the attack.

Just to put their 'elation' into perspective: Of the top 100 newspapers in the US, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a media watch group based in New York City, reports that 47 ran editorials on the attack; 39 clearly in favour of it, seven ambiguous (although some may argue that they too were in favour), and only one opposing it. Journalist Brian Williams, who was caught lying about going to Iraq with a Navy Seal team in a helicopter that was hit by a rocket propelled grenade, described the images of the cruise missile launch as "beautiful pictures" live on MSNBC. What he didn't mention was that the missiles in those "beautiful pictures" killed seven Syrian Arab Army (SAA) soldiers and 7 (or 9) civilians according to reports.

The attack was justified by the US saying (without conducting an investigation or presenting any evidence) that President Assad had used chemical weapons on Syrians in Idlib. This is precisely what the Russian government and others protested in the emergency UN Security Council meeting, called after the attack. Asking, why the US would not wait for the United Nations or other agencies to complete their investigations to find out what had really happened before acting?

Especially after the Russian Ministry of Defence released information about a Syrian army airstrike in Idlib on a rebel warehouse allegedly housing chemical weapons which, according to them, released the chemicals resulting in the deaths that were being used to vilify President Assad. And after what had happened in East Ghouta in 2013 when the US almost went to war with Syria, accusing President Assad of having used chemical weapons (similar to now), which was later proven to be false by many different agencies and individuals — including Pulitzer Prize winning Journalist Seymour Hersh, Former UN Weapons Inspector Richard Lloyd, the UN and its former Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte (which was blacked out of the mainstream media).



Ray McGovern, who was head of the Soviet Foreign Policy branch of the CIA, reminded everyone in an interview with journalist Lee Stranahan right after the recent alleged chemical attack, that back in 2014, the UN Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) had confirmed the destruction of all declared chemical weapons held by the Syrian government on board of a US maritime vessel, under UN supervision, following the East Ghouta incident. Moreover, in January 2016, the OPCW had again certified that the Syrian government was free of all chemical weapons.

Despite the mainstream media's failure to report on all of these and more, what it most criminally failed to do is point out the illegality of the US strike on Syria, perhaps unsurprisingly, as has been the case starting with the (illegal under international law but 'humanitarian') NATO-US bombing of Yugoslavia in 1995.

Marjorie Cohn, Professor Emeritus at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, wrote in *Consortium News*,

"Regardless of who is responsible for the Khan Sheikhoun chemical deaths...Trump's response violated both US and international law".

This is because the US War Powers Resolution act only authorises the President to introduce US Armed Forces into hostilities or imminent hostilities in three situations, according to the professor:

"First, after Congress has declared war, which has not happened in this case; second, in 'a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces,' which has not occurred; third, when there is 'specific statutory authorisation,' which there is not". Making it illegal under US laws.

Meanwhile, the UN Charter prohibits the “use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state”, except for in two cases. One, when done in self-defence after an armed attack (the US was not attacked). Two, after getting approval of the UN Security Council (which was not even sought). Making it illegal under international law as well.

The US administration had to, of course, be fully aware of this. And of the fact that Russia already had some armaments and military personnel placed in Syria to fight ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and the 50 other shades of extremists running rampant in the country, alongside the SAA, which the US attacked — despite risks of sparking a greater conflagration — although, reportedly, only after informing the Russians about it.

And what was the Russian response? To immediately suspend its flight safety memorandum over Syria with the US. Which, according to veteran journalist and correspondent-at-large of *Asia Times*, Pepe Escobar, meant that Russia, “if it chooses”, could “intercept any Pentagon flying object” from then on. Additionally sending its frigate — Admiral Grigorovich — into the Eastern Mediterranean, towards the location of the US destroyer that launched the cruise missiles into Syria.

Its Prime Minister, clearly unhappy with where things were headed, said that the attack put the US “on the verge of a military clash” with Russia. Meaning that if nothing else, what the attack did manage to do was “push the doomsday clock closer to midnight”, shattering hopes of de-escalating tensions following Trump being voted into the White House (as his campaign rhetoric had indicated towards a possible reconciliation with the Russian and Syrian governments).



The key point about the current situation, however, was stressed on by President Putin. That trust between the two nations, because of the attack, was at its lowest since the end of the Cold War. And what that does is increase chances of ‘accidental collisions/conflicts’ or worse, which can quickly get out of hand, unleashing a chain of events that both sides may not live to regret.

And that is why cooler heads need to prevail and fast. That dialogue between the two nuclear armed powers have resumed since the attack is a positive step towards the de-

escalation of tensions. However, the international community must point out that the habit of unilateral aggression, illegal under international law, adopted by the US and its allies ever since the end of the Cold War, is both unacceptable and unhelpful when it comes to solving crises around the world.

And as the Russians have vehemently been saying for a while now, will only be tolerated by countries on the receiving end for so long, before they start to take things into their own hands. At which point, you will have nuclear armed powers pointing their nukes at each other with hands on triggers, wondering whether they will and when, be forced to do the unthinkable — start a nuclear war/Armageddon.

It is now two and a half minutes to midnight. The closest the world has ever been, according to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, to a probable “global catastrophe”.

Eresh Omar Jamal is a member of the Editorial team at The Daily Star.

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