

Trump Plays Nuclear ‘Chicken’ with Putin Over Syria

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U.S. President Donald Trump is playing a game of nuclear “chicken” with Russian President Vladimir Putin, regarding Putin’s [threat on June 19th](#) to go to war against the United States if the U.S. again shoots down, inside Syria — in the sovereign territory of the internationally-recognized-as-legal sovereign Syrian government — Syrian aircraft, or the aircraft of any of the foreign governments that have allied with Syria: Russia, Iran, and China.

After the U.S. had shot down a Syrian government plane on June 19th, which was bombing jihadists whom the U.S. government backs in order to overthrow the Syrian government, [Russia announced](#):

“In areas where Russian aviation is conducting combat missions in the Syrian skies, any flying objects, including jets and unmanned aerial vehicles of the international coalition discovered west of the Euphrates River, will be followed by Russian air and ground defenses as air targets” — meaning ordered out, or else immediately shot down.

That would place the U.S. and Russia in a traditional war against each other, over Syrian territory (Russia to protect Syria’s government, [U.S. to replace it by a Saudi-allied jihadist one](#)). The loser in that war, over the battlefields in Syria, would then have only one way to prevent defeat, which is a blitz nuclear attack against the other’s homeland, World War III between Russia and U.S., which would be ‘won’ by whichever of the two sides suffered the less damage (irrespective of whether the entire planet and ultimately all life will then have actually been destroyed by the exchange). The first side to attack would knock out many of the other side’s retaliatory silo-based ICBMs and thus probably be the ‘winner’, though that’s not certain (since most nukes aren’t silo-based).

Russia’s announcement is basically saying that direct war between Russia and the U.S. will result if the U.S. persists in its effort to conquer Syria, but the *Washington Post* has said that it’s really only a ‘[bluff](#)’, and CNBC has said that it’s only ‘[bluster](#)’, and Trump is now splitting hairs over whether he goes with that view (the neoconservative view) to [continue the war against Assad](#), or whether Trump instead will abandon the neoconservative effort and [withdraw American forces from Syria once ISIS there is defeated](#).

Whereas [Trump’s Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has served as Trump’s mouthpiece to allege that the U.S. will not conquer and has no intention to conquer Syria](#), Trump’s press-spokesman and also his U.N. Ambassador have [threatened that the U.S. will again directly attack Assad’s forces if and when it wants to do so](#).

Both President Emmanuel Macron of France, and Prime Minister Theresa May of UK, [have already gone on record](#) as supporting the neoconservative position, that the U.S. and its allies should dictate to the sovereign government of Syria, and that Syria's government should obey. Macron himself has even warned that "the use of chemical weapons will be met with a response, and even if France acts alone."

The summit meeting of the heads of state of the G20 countries [will take place in Hamburg on 7 and 8 July 2017](#). Included there will be not only the U.S.-allied leaders — especially Macron, May, and Saudi Arabia's King and Crown Prince — but also Putin, and also China's Xi Jinping. There is some press-speculation that Trump wants to negotiate a deal there for Russia to abandon its alliance with Syria, and also its alliance with Iran. President Obama had tried to do that, but Putin declined the proposal. Perhaps the Western alliance is making these soundings of moving forward despite the Russian warning, so as to increase the pressure on Putin to cave, to crack him. In any event, the jihadists ([agents of the Saudis](#)) in Syria know that if they again [set up a chemical attack so as to blame it on Assad](#), the U.S. and its allies have already committed themselves to go to war to overthrow Syria's government (for 'humanitarian reasons'). Any jihadist group there could thus pull the trigger even prior to the G20 Summit.

Perhaps a jihadist will indeed pull the trigger, but would the U.S. then serve as the gun that some of Trump's federal employees have promised the U.S. will be in such an instance? In a game of chicken, each side threatens, and maybe also deceives, so that its opponent will believe the worst; but the individual who pulls the trigger might turn out to be an obscure person about whom the general public knows nothing. [It happened in WW I](#), and there is no reason why it couldn't happen again. Furthermore (as that linked-to source also well documents), underestimating the seriousness of a head-of-state's commitments, can produce global catastrophe.

Investigative historian Eric Zuesse is the author, most recently, of [They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010](#), and of [CHRIST'S VENTRILOQUISTS: The Event that Created Christianity](#).

Featured image: Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump (Photo from [Sky News](#))

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