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Trump Betrays Trumpism: Syria in the Crosshairs

By Justin Raimondo
April 6, 2017

President Donald Trump has launched an attack on a Syrian air base in retaliation for the alleged sarin gas attack supposedly carried out by Bashar al-Assad's government on Islamist rebels in Idlib. The irony is this contradicts every statement he ever made about Syria in the presidential campaign. Furthermore, this attack takes place barely 72 hours after the alleged incident, with no clear evidence that Assad was responsible.

In ordering this strike – more than 50 missiles launched by US ships in the Mediterranean Sea – Trump has blown up a basic tenet of Trumpism to smithereens.

One of my vivid memories of the 2016 campaign is the look on Bill O'Reilly's face when Donald Trump answered his question about intervening militarily in Syria and the Russian role in that country:

O'Reilly: "Once Putin gets in and fights ISIS on behalf of Assad, Putin runs Syria. He owns it. He'll never get out, never."

Trump: "Alright, okay, fine. I mean, you know, we can be in Syria. Do you want to run Syria? Do you want to own Syria? I want to rebuild our country."

Here's a tweet – in all caps, no less – from 2013, in which Trump gave vent to his views about intervening in the Syrian mess:

And then there's this statement, uttered in a speech to his supporters after the election during his "victory tour":

I could go on, but you get the picture: Trump campaigned against precisely the kind of intervention that he is now launching. At a news conference in the Rose Garden, with King Abdullah of Jordan looking on, he said:

"I now have responsibility. It crossed a lot of lines for me. When you kill innocent children, innocent babies – babies, little babies – with a chemical gas that is so lethal ... that crosses many, many lines, beyond a red line.... I do change and I am flexible. That attack on children yesterday had a big impact on me. Big impact. It was a horrible, horrible thing. It's very, very possible that my attitude toward Syria and Assad has changed very much."

Twenty-four hours after the alleged incident – with the United Nations still refusing to say whether there had been a gas attack, or, if so, who is responsible – the President of the United States does a complete turnaround, ditches a campaign promise, and takes us to the brink of a greatly expanded war in Syria.

For a little extra irony, those who have been smearing him as a "Russian agent" and are trying to destroy his presidency are the very same people who have been urging him to "act presidential" and launch an attack on the government in Damascus.

Welcome to Bizarro World, where up is down, left is right, and the biggest enemy of Trumpism is ... Trump.

I've pinned a tweet to the top of my Twitter profile, one that you might take as a sort of journalistic credo, and it says simply this: "Where's the evidence?" So what's the evidence that the Syrian military, on the brink of victory against both the Islamist rebels and their allies in ISIS and al-Qaeda – and days away from a conference that was to have decided Syria's fate – used sarin gas against a village in the Idlib region?

The only such evidence is coming from the Syrian rebels, radical Islamists who are ideologically indistinguishable from ISIS and who have committed endless atrocities in their battle to overthrow Assad. They claim that dozens of children, women, and other civilians are the victims of a deliberate attack by Syrian government forces.

In a court of law, the record of a witness is a crucial matter. If it can be proved that the witness has lied, the judge can and usually does tell the jury to disregard their testimony. In the case of Syria's Islamist rebels, their record of serial fabrications speaks for itself. I wrote about this in detail in 2013:

“Those rollicking jihadists, the Syrian rebels, love a joke: although they can be deadly serious – such as when they’re eating the internal organs of their enemies – what they enjoy more than anything is a really good prank. There was the time they claimed the Assad regime was killing babies in incubators – not very original, but hey, it worked for the Kuwaitis! Then there was the ‘massacre’ at Houla, which was alleged to have killed 32 children and over 60 adults: a photo started appearing in the mainstream media, documenting the slaughter. The state-supported BBC was first to run with it – until it was discovered the supposedly incriminating photo was taken in Iraq during the recent war. The photographer was justifiably furious, the story was withdrawn, and the Syrian rebels went back to the drawing board.

The photo was supplied to the BBC by the rebels.

This record alone is enough to condemn them out of their own mouths, but here’s a list some of the other hoaxes they’ve tried to pull off:

- In 2013, Islamist rebels claimed the Assad government had dropped chemical weapons on civilians in the city of Aleppo. It turned out to be tear gas or a similar substance used for riot control.
- That same year, the rebels claimed Assad’s forces had used chemical weapons in the town of Ghouta, but this was debunked by UN war crimes official Carla del Ponte, who supervised the Hague investigation into crimes committed during the Kosovo war. Del Ponte said it was the rebels, not the Syrian government, who were responsible for the gas attack. Award-winning journalist Seymour Hersh pointed his finger at the Turks and the rebel group known as al-Nusra as being behind what was a false flag attack.
- When President Obama was about to authorize an attack on the Assad regime in response to the alleged poison gas attack on Ghouta, he was brought up short by DNI James Clapper, as Jeffrey Goldberg reported in *The Atlantic*:

“Obama was also unsettled by a surprise visit early in the week from James Clapper, his director of national intelligence, who interrupted the President’s Daily Brief, the threat report Obama receives each morning from Clapper’s analysts, to make clear that the intelligence on Syria’s use of sarin gas, while robust, was not a “slam dunk.” He chose the term carefully. Clapper, the chief of an intelligence community traumatized by its failures in the run-up to the Iraq War, was not going to overpromise, in the manner of the onetime CIA director George Tenet, who famously guaranteed George W. Bush a ‘slam dunk’ in Iraq.”
- And don’t forget the case of “Syria Danny,” whose on-camera antics were exposed as he staged a Syrian army “attack” for the benefit of CNN’s Anderson Cooper.
- Fake videos are a favorite ploy utilized by *both sides* in the Syrian civil war. Here’s a compilation, along with an account of how easily Western reporters were fooled.

Phil Giraldi, a former intelligence official, tells our very own Scott Horton that the “military and intelligence personnel,” “intimately familiar” with the intelligence, say that the narrative that

Assad or Russia did it is a “sham,” instead endorsing the Russian narrative that Assad’s forces had bombed a rebel storage facility containing some sort of chemical weapons. Giraldi’s intelligence sources are “astonished” at the government and media narrative and are considering going public out of concern over the danger of making a bad situation even worse.

Are we really going to war based on dubious “intelligence” like this? Remember the last time we did that?

The alleged chemical attack occurred in Idlib, where “al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and Turkish-backed Salafi” are in control. These are the “rebels” whose word the Trump administration is taking as gospel – the same people who took down the World Trade Center and struck the Pentagon on 9/11.

What is going on here?

Let’s look at the larger picture. US intelligence agencies have been conducting a war of attrition against the Trump administration, leaking classified information compiled by Obama era officials and spearheading an investigation into alleged “Russian influence” on the 2016 election. These same spooks have been working with the Islamist rebels for years, alongside the Saudis and the Gulf emirates, in an effort to overthrow Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad. Trump’s past opposition to their efforts is undoubtedly a big factor in their campaign to discredit the President. Could Trump’s capitulation and sudden turnaround on this issue be an effort to “make a deal” with the intelligence community?

The Syrian attack also has domestic political value to Trump in that it shows him being “tough” on Russia. As the investigation into his alleged “collusion” with the Russians during the 2016 presidential campaign proceeds, he’s no doubt hoping that some of the pressure may be taken off. In my view, it’s a vain hope – but he’ll learn that lesson soon enough.

There’s no such thing as “foreign policy” – it’s all about domestic politics. Leaders make decisions based not on the facts on the ground but on their calculation of how one course will redound to their benefit while the other course will hurt them on the home front. Trump, for all his claims that he’s “not a politician,” is acting just like they all do in this case.

But will this about-face on Syria really benefit him politically?

Millions of Americans voted for him because he promised to abjure “regime change” operations like the one that backfired so badly in Libya, not to mention Iraq. Indeed, it was Trump who stood before a group of Republicans in the South Carolina presidential debate and declared that the Bush administration had lied us into the Iraq war – and then proceeded to win that state’s primary handily, going on to get the nomination and win the election.

The paradox of Trump’s November victory is that he has provided anti-interventionists with the ammunition they need to shoot down his arguments for intervening in Syria. It’s only necessary to cite his many pronouncements on the subject, all of them inveighing against the “regime change” policies favored by Hillary Clinton and her supporters, and ask: what’s changed?

Trump's base opposes meddling in Syria to oust the Assad government. They can be mobilized to oppose this new madness – and there are millions of them. Trump has laid the basis for his own undoing. If he goes ahead and follows the advice of John McCain and Lindsey Graham, escalates the war on Assad, and saves the Syrian Islamists from defeat, his base will defect in droves. And they are already disaffected, what with the failure of the healthcare bill, the apparent demotion of chief Trumpian ideologist Steve Bannon, and the stalling of much of Trump's agenda. Is starting another war in the Middle East supposed to be evidence that this is a President who “gets things done,” as the administration likes to boast? I don't think so.

The danger is that what is being described as a “limited strike” will escalate into a much wider conflict. The Russians are on the ground in Syria: so are thousands of American soldiers, along with the Turks, the Iranians, the Israelis, and Hezbollah. Retaliation against American forces from either the Syrians, or the Russians – if Russians are killed or injured in the strikes – is entirely possible. We are on the brink of a regional explosion.

Now we'll have to endure the cries of the War Party that Trump has “grown in office” and given up his “isolationist” views when faced with the “reality” of “American global leadership.” Lunatics like John McCain are calling for stopping the Syrian air force from flying, increasing sanctions on Russia, and even going to war with Russia – as McCain did, when he said “I don't give a damn” when asked what happens if we kill Russian soldiers. “We will win a war with Russia,” said McCain, “because we're superior.” This is certifiable craziness – but that's the kind of world we live in now.

One more thing: the airfield that was bombed is said to be the site of Assad's store of sarin gas. Yet you'll remember that Syria was supposed to have surrendered the entirety of its chemical weapons, and this was certified by the United Nations, the Russians, and the Obama administration. So what chemical weapons are we talking about? Stay tuned for the next act in this drama, as demands for the inspection of this site are raised. What happens if – or when – the inspectors are let in and there's nothing to be found?