

Russia-Baiting Pushed Trump to Attack Syria — and Increases the Risks of Nuclear Annihilation

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Global Research, April 10, 2017

Region: [Russia and FSU, USA](#)

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Vast efforts to portray Donald Trump as Vladimir Putin's flunky have given Trump huge incentives to prove otherwise. Last Thursday, he began the process in a big way by ordering a missile attack on Russia's close ally Syria. In the aftermath of the attack, the [cheerleading](#) from U.S. mass media was close to [unanimous](#), and the assault won lots of praise on Capitol Hill. Finally, the protracted and fervent depictions of Trump as a Kremlin tool were getting some tangible results.

At this point, the anti-Russia bandwagon has gained so much momentum that a national frenzy is boosting the odds of unfathomable catastrophe. The world's two nuclear superpowers are in confrontation mode.

It's urgent to tell ourselves and each other: *Wake up!*

The dangers of a direct U.S.-Russian military conflict are spiking upward. After the missile attack, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced that it was suspending a memorandum of understanding with the United States to prevent mid-air collisions over Syria. And Russia's prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev, issued a [statement](#) referring to "our now completely ruined relations" and declaring that the United States was "on the verge of a military clash with Russia."

These ominous developments are a longtime dream come true for ultra-hawks like Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, who've gained leverage in an alliance with numerous congressional Democrats. The neocons and the "liberal interventionists" really have something going now, after propagating the meme that Trump is a Putin puppet.

At this perilous moment in human history, the quality of the Democratic Party leadership was embodied in a [tweet](#) last month from the Democratic National Committee's new chair, Tom Perez, who sent out this message about a weekly address by President Trump: "Translated from the original Russian and everything."

Such tactics aren't just McCarthyite. They are baiting, goading and pressurizing Trump to prove that he's willing to clash with Russia after all.

Those tactics are a far cry from what's actually needed — truly independent investigations — in order to address the charges that Russia interfered with the U.S. election last year. We most definitely do not need the kind of baiting and goading that creates enormous pressure

on Trump to show he's willing and able to go to the brink of war with Russia.



Make no mistake. With 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons at the ready in the United States and Russia, pushing to heighten tensions between the two countries is playing with thermonuclear fire.

Early this year, citing the escalation of those tensions, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved its "Doomsday Clock" even closer to midnight.

"In 2017, we find the danger to be even greater, the need for action more urgent," the Bulletin [declared](#). "It is two and a half minutes to midnight, the Clock is ticking, global danger looms. Wise public officials should act immediately, guiding humanity away from the brink. If they do not, wise citizens must step forward and lead the way. "

People at the grassroots must lead, pushing and pulling the official leaders to follow. To stop the current war train — and to quite possibly rescue the fate of the earth — we must get a grip. If we depend on the "leadership" in Congress, all that we hold dear will drift into still-greater jeopardy.

With Congress now in recess, most legislators are back home — and they should hear from us. Pick up the phone, make an appointment to visit their district offices, or show up without an appointment.

Right now, in one minute, you can [send an email to your senators and representative](#) with your own message or with this one:

"As a constituent, I urge you to make a public statement that you support a complete cutoff of funds for U.S. military actions in Syria. This step is vital to prevent our country from adding to the deadly violence in Syria — and to halt the momentum toward a military confrontation with Russia that could end with escalation into a horrific nuclear exchange."



Detente between the United States and Russia will be necessary for bringing peace to Syria. The same goes for reducing — instead of increasing — the chances that nuclear weapons will destroy us all.

What passes for leadership on these matters in Congress will not save us. On the contrary, right now the congressional leaders are serving as enablers for what Martin Luther King Jr. called “the madness of militarism.”

Even the better statements from Capitol Hill about the April 6 missile attack have been grimly inadequate. So, Senator Chris Murphy warned of “the potential quagmire of Syria,” while Senator Bernie Sanders said:

“I’m deeply concerned that these strikes could lead to the United States once again being dragged back into the quagmire of long-term military engagement in the Middle East.”

Expressing concern about a “quagmire” is all well and good, but falls far short of acknowledging what’s at stake.

On Sunday, the *Washington Post* published a sobering — and frightening — [article](#) by the person who was the national security adviser for Joe Biden during his last two years as vice president.

“If the Trump administration and the Kremlin are not able to come to a meeting of the minds on Syria,” wrote Colin Kahl, “it could set the two nuclear powers on a dangerous collision course.”

Kahl, now an associate professor in security studies at Georgetown University, sketched out a plausible scenario:

“The Syrian dictator (perhaps prodded by Russia or Iran) may attempt to test Trump again, hoping to prove the president is a ‘paper tiger.’ And Trump, having invested his personal credibility in standing firm, may find himself psychologically or politically compelled to respond, despite the very real risks that it could result in a direct military clash with Russia.”

And, Kahl added,

“Given Russia’s vital interests in Syria, Moscow is not likely to respond positively to U.S. ultimatums and maximalist positions. If the administration

does not find a way to give the Kremlin a face-saving way out, conflict is much more likely than accommodation.”

Kahl’s article concluded:

“Sinking into a Syrian quagmire would be bad enough. World War III would be far worse.”

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