

French NPA candidate Philippe Poutou defends Trump's bombing of Syria

By Alex Lantier
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The reaction of the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) to the Trump administration's missile strikes against Syria marks a new and deep shift to the right in the evolution of this pro-imperialist, middle-class party. Having supported the imperialist proxy war for regime change in Syria since it began in 2011, it is now aligning itself with a direct imperialist intervention and announcing its hostility to protests against the dangerous spiral of military escalation now underway.

In a campaign statement virtually indistinguishable from CIA propaganda, NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou makes no criticisms of the US aggression against Syria, but shamelessly equates opposition to war with support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and mass murder. (All quotes from Poutou are taken verbatim from the very poor English translation posted by International Viewpoint, the web publication of the Pabloite international to which the NPA is affiliated.)

Poutou begins by applauding the Trump administration's claims that the strike is retaliation for an alleged chemical attack in Khan Sheikhoun: "For the first time in six years, the army of the war criminal El Assad has been the target of air strikes. 59 US missiles destroyed the Shayrat air base, from base of the aircraft responsible for Tuesday's attack on chemical weapons against the civilian population of Khan Sheikhoun, which killed at least 86, including 27 children.

"Butcher El Assad with the Iranian and Russian armies has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians, constantly bombarding the civilian population and resistance forces with his bloodthirsty regime," Poutou continues, concluding: "Therefore, without any support for or hope in the American army strikes, we will not join the protests of the French political parties, who, in order to advocate a 'reasonable' peace with El Assad and his minions, close their eyes to the hundreds of thousands of deaths killed by the dictator and the millions of displaced and refugees."

This amounts to declaration by the NPA that it will bitterly oppose an antiwar movement and defend the war drive of the Trump administration, supported by the European Union (EU) and the Democratic Party in the United States. The US bombing threatens to escalate into a war directly between the NATO powers and Syria's backers, Iran and nuclear-armed Russia. Even though such a war could lead to the incineration of the planet, the NPA still defends the war drive.

Poutou's pro-war argument is based on lies and unsubstantiated assertions. He takes as fact the claim that Assad's forces used chemical weapons in Khan Sheikhoun, which no investigation has verified. In fact, there is little doubt that this attack was carried out by CIA-backed forces. Poutou does not say that the last major chemical attack in Syria, in Ghouta in 2013, was carried out by Islamist opposition militias who at the time blamed the attack on Assad, and who now control the area of Idlib province in which Khan Sheikhoun is located.

Poutou's slanderous claim that opposing an imperialist war to destroy the Assad regime means sanctioning mass murder is based on political lies. Firstly, the main responsibility for the mass killings and devastation in Syria lies not with Assad or his backers in Russia and Iran, but with Washington, the imperialist powers in Europe and their political supporters, including the NPA. The CIA, European intelligence and the Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms poured billions of dollars into opposition militias in an attempt to topple Assad.

Above all, it is a political slander to claim that millions of people in France and around the world oppose the drive to a horrific new war because they support "Assad and his minions." Workers have had bitter experiences over a quarter century with Middle East wars, from Syria to Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen, which cost millions of lives and trillions of dollars. They sense that a new

imperialist war, let alone one that escalates into all-out nuclear war between Russia and NATO, will only lead to disaster.

The NPA's nod to mass antiwar sentiment, saying it does not place hope in US air strikes, is deceitful and false. In fact, it is attacking Trump not from the left, but from the right—for not having been consistent enough in threatening Syria, Iran and Russia. Based on the lie that Assad ordered the Khan Sheikhou attack, Poutou blames Trump for it, implying that Assad would not have carried it out if Trump had immediately taken a more aggressive stance.

Poutou writes, "Just a week ago, his team amplified its previous position by indicating that an agreement with Bashar Al-Assad was envisaged within the framework of the 'war on terror,' and also with other oppressive powers like Putin, Sisi or Netanyahu. These signals were clearly interpreted by the Syrian regime as an encouragement to pursue its course, and after Obama, Trump therefore has his share of responsibility in the atrocious chemical attack and the deaths of Khan Cheikhoun."

In this, the NPA is speaking for layers in the affluent middle class who support the most aggressive factions of the foreign policy establishment in Europe and the United States. Trump's bombing of Syria was the outcome of months of bitter factional infighting in Washington, as the CIA, the Democratic Party and its European allies denounced Trump for his alleged ties to Russia and Syria, and his refusal to threaten them with military action.

These forces ultimately won the factional struggle, and Trump ordered the bombing last week, setting into motion vast political and military conflicts on an international scale. This is in particular exposing the role of affluent middle class "left" parties like the NPA, who have been among the most rabid defenders of the imperialist war drive launched in Libya, Syria and across the Middle East in 2011, in response to the Egyptian Revolution.

When protests with close links to Islamist circles began in Benghazi, the NPA and its international co-thinkers, prominently Professor Gilbert Achcar, stepped in to promote imperialist wars for regime change as democratic revolutions.

Achcar wrote, "If Gaddafi were permitted to continue his military offensive and take Benghazi, there would be a major massacre. Here is a case where a population is truly in danger, and where there is no plausible alternative that could protect it. The attack by Gaddafi's forces was hours

or at most days away. You can't in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians."

Achcar subsequently went on to plan the escalation of the Syrian conflict later that year, meeting with the CIA-linked Syrian National Council (SNC) in October 2011 before boasting of the meeting in an article he published the next month in *Al Akhbar*.

Nothing more clearly illustrates the class gulf separating the NPA from the working class in France and internationally than its role in planning and promoting imperialist wars that have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, shattered entire countries and now threaten to provoke world war. Poutou's statement repeats the NPA's constant, provocative demands, over six years of war, that the imperialist powers step up their arming of opposition militias fighting the Syrian regime and its allies.

He declares, "We have always demanded the lifting of the embargo on arms sales to the secular resistance, an embargo that left it without real defence, only the fundamentalist jihadists have been able to procure arms—and not in anti-aircraft weapons—from the Gulf countries and Turkey."

Here, Poutou is again deceiving his readers, to present the war for regime change as progressive. There has been no "embargo" on arms to opposition militias—whether Islamist ones like Ahrar al Sham or the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front, or nominally secular ones like the Free Syrian Army or the majority-Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces. They were defeated not because the imperialist powers did not arm them, as Poutou claims, but because they had no popular support, and the NPA's claims to be supporting a democratic revolution were a fraud.

Poutou's statement is a warning that workers and youth can oppose war and defend their most fundamental interests only in a ruthless struggle against the NPA.

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