

What would a US-European-Russian war look like?

13 April 2017

Tensions between the United States and the major European imperialist powers and Russia are at their highest point since the Cold War. The danger of a military conflict between the two largest nuclear powers has never been greater.

Since the April 6 missile strike, the Trump administration has issued new threats against Syria and new ultimatums to Russia to end its support for the regime of Bashar al-Assad. On Wednesday, President Trump defended the unprovoked strike and called Assad a “butcher.”

The G7 powers over the weekend lined up behind the US strike and its pretext—the totally unproven claim that the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack on a rebel-held town. They endorsed Washington’s renewed drive to topple Assad, Moscow’s only Arab ally in the Middle East.

Russia has responded by stepping up its military support for Assad. Last Friday, it discontinued its coordination with the US aimed at avoiding encounters between US and Russian jets and announced that it would upgrade Syrian missile air defenses, which already include advanced S-400 and S-300 radar/missile batteries. It diverted a frigate with cruise missiles to the Eastern Mediterranean. And it issued a joint statement with the Iranian military warning that it would respond with force to any new act of aggression against Syria.

The recklessness of US policy was highlighted by Defense Secretary and retired general James Mattis, who told reporters on Tuesday that Syria would pay “a very, very stiff price” in the event of another chemical attack, which is undoubtedly already being prepared by the CIA and its Al Qaeda-linked proxies in Syria. Mattis offered assurances that the situation would not “spiral out of control,” based on the assumption that Russia would “act in their best interests,” i.e., back

down.

What is most astonishing is the virtual absence of any discussion in the US and European media of the danger of a war between the US and Russia and the consequences of such a turn of events. What happens if a US jet is shot down by a Russian anti-aircraft installation or Russian jet? One can only imagine the frenzied demands for retaliation that will spew out of the press and politicians of both countries.

How many millions will die in the opening minutes of a nuclear exchange between Russia and the US? Neither the *New York Times*, nor the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Times of London*, *Le Monde*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* or *Sydney Morning Herald* is even raising these questions.

There have, however, been revealing commentaries in certain more specialized publications. *The Conversation* published an article on April 7 (“Why US air strike on Syria deeply threatens military clash with Russia”) making the point that the danger of a clash between the US and Russia is much greater than in 2013 because Russia has in the interim firmly established a military presence in Syria.

“So, if the new aim of the Trump administration is the removal of Assad from power,” the article states, “this could only happen through a major confrontation with Russia.”

Russia Beyond the Headlines published an article on April 7 outlining three possible scenarios following the US attack on Syria. The first, and presumably most likely, is “Armed conflict between Russia and the US.” Sooner or later, the article notes, the “logic of confrontation will force Russia to respond with force.” It quotes a Russian international security expert who warns that “we cannot fully exclude the use of nuclear weapons.”

An April 7 article on the *Defense One* web site

explains that a US assault on Syria would for the first time in the “decades-old counter-terrorism fight” pit the United States against a “real, modern and well-armed military,” resulting in a war “of exponentially greater scale.”

Steven Starr, a senior scientist at Physicians for Social Responsibility and associate with the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, who is a noted expert on the life-destroying environmental consequences of “nuclear winter,” explains that once a nuclear exchange between Washington and Moscow gets underway, the death toll will be in the high tens of millions within the first hour, and that will be only the horrific beginning.

The two countries have between them 3,500 deployed and operational strategic nuclear weapons that they can detonate within an hour. They have another 4,600 nuclear weapons in reserve and ready for use. Given these vast numbers of mega-weapons, there is a strong chance that most large cities in both countries will be hit. Starr estimates that 30 percent of the US and Russian populations will be killed in the first hour. A few weeks later, radioactive fallout will kill another 50 percent or more.

Nuclear winter, a new Ice Age caused by the environmental impact of nuclear war, will “probably cause most people on the planet to die of starvation within a couple of years.”

Then there is the possibility of a high-altitude detonation triggering an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) that destroys electronic circuits over an area of tens of thousands of square miles. “A single detonation over the US East Coast would destroy the grid and cause every nuclear power plant affected by EMP to melt down. Imagine 60 Fukushimas happening at the same time in the US.”

This is the end-of-world scenario being prepared behind the backs of the American and world population by the power- and profit-mad criminals in the Pentagon and the CIA, with the full support of both parties and the political and media establishment. People living in cities from New York to Boston to Philadelphia to Detroit, Chicago and all the way to Los Angeles and San Francisco will likely be obliterated within minutes of the beginning of such a war.

What preparations are being made? What is the survival plan? There are none. The silence of the media

and politicians is not an oversight. They know that should this prospect become a subject of public discussion, the shock will produce uncontrollable social convulsions.

The astonishing recklessness of the ruling elite has an objective source. It is the global crisis of the capitalist system, which finds its sharpest expression in the long-term economic decline of the United States. Even during the Cold War there remained within the dominant sections of the ruling class a certain caution. Now, the relentlessly aggressive tone of the media and constant demonizing of Russian President Putin almost seem calculated to provoke a military clash. There is, in fact, a significant faction within the ruling elite and the state that is prepared to do just that.

This horrifying prospect cannot be averted through appeals to the powers-that-be. The entire history of the 20th century, with its catastrophic wars, shows that the only way to prevent war is through a mass movement of the working class. Workers and youth must confront the urgency of the situation by organizing mass protests directed toward the building of an international anti-war movement based on the working class to put an end to imperialism and capitalism.

On April 30, the International Committee of the Fourth International is organizing an International May Day Online Rally, called in opposition to war, authoritarianism and poverty, for peace, equality and socialism. The event will be broadcast at 11:00 am Eastern Daylight Time (3:00 pm UTC/GMT) and transmitted live throughout the world. We urge all of our readers to participate. For more information, visit [wsws.org/mayday](http://www.wsws.org/mayday).

Barry Grey

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>