

Russian aid convoy prompts Ukraine war threats with US backing

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Ukraine and its backers in Washington and Brussels are using Moscow's dispatch of a humanitarian aid convoy to step up their warmongering against Russia.

The 280 trucks left Moscow Tuesday for the 620-mile journey to Ukraine's eastern region. Russia's Foreign Ministry says the convoy is carrying approximately 2,000 metric tons of supplies including cereals, sugar, baby food, medical supplies, sleeping bags and generators. The aid convoy was headed for the border near Kharkiv city, which is controlled by Ukrainian government forces, but had reportedly stopped in central Russia after Kiev said it would not allow it to cross into Ukraine.

Initial reports said that Kiev and Moscow had agreed the convoy with the International Red Cross. Very quickly, however, the Ukrainian regime—installed with the backing of the United States and Germany in February's coup—was insisting that the convoy would be blocked. Interior Minister Arsen Avakov denounced the convoy as a “provocation by a cynical aggressor”, while Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk described it as “boundless cynicism”.

Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister Danylo Lubkivsky accused Russia of playing an “absolutely cynical game.” “They are trying to use the pretext of humanitarian aid and assistance, and it seems they are just running out of excuses for their aggression,” he said.

Earlier, Valeriy Chaly, deputy head of Ukraine's presidential administration, said any attempt to move across the border without Kiev's permission would be treated as an “act of aggression.”

Kiev's stance has been backed by all the Western powers and the media, who are claiming that the aid mission is likely a “Trojan Horse”, carrying weapons and/or Russian special forces intent on a military

invasion. At the weekend, US President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that Russia would face “additional consequences” if it intervened in Ukraine without the authorisation of Kiev. The US and the European Union have already imposed punitive sanctions against Russia.

On Tuesday, US State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf told reporters, “Russia has no right to move into Ukraine unilaterally, whether under the guise of humanitarian convoys or any other pretext, without Kiev's permission.”

The crisis in eastern Ukraine is “a direct result of Russia's intervention”, she added.

All such claims are rank hypocrisy.

The statement by Merkel and Obama came the same day that the US president authorised air strikes in northern Iraq against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an offshoot of Al Qaeda.

The official pretext for the strikes are humanitarian concerns over the fate of thousands of members of the Yazidi religious minority trapped in the Mount Sinjar region by the ISIS advance. On this basis, the Western powers—led by Washington—have unilaterally intervened into a country that they are responsible for destabilising through the 2003 illegal invasion and occupation.

Moreover, they are doing so supposedly to halt the advances of Islamic militants that they, and their allies in the Gulf States and Turkey, have helped train, arm and finance. In addition to bombing raids, the US has despatched another 130 troops to Iraq, while France has announced it will begin directly arming the Kurdish Peshmerga militia.

The revival of direct imperialist intervention in Iraq is proof once again of the fraud of “humanitarianism”, so beloved by the pseudo-left groups that function as its

cheerleaders. Whether something is deemed to qualify as a humanitarian intervention depends entirely on who is doing it and whose interests are served.

For all the denunciations of the Russian convoy, there is no question that the situation in eastern Ukraine constitutes a humanitarian catastrophe. More than one month ago, a report by the International Red Cross said the numbers affected by the crisis involved “almost the entire population of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.”

These are the two main cities in eastern Ukraine that had rejected February’s putsch in referenda. Since then, Kiev has intensified its offensive in the east, regularly bombarding towns and cities with Grad missiles and unleashing its National Guard and “volunteer militias”, staffed by fascists, in the region.

Even Britain’s *Times* newspaper, which is banging the drum for Western confrontation with Russia, stated that “800,000 refugees have fled Donetsk and nearby cities, 700,000 of them to Russia. The result is a humanitarian crisis and a military tinderbox from which Western governments have been distracted by the turmoil in Iraq.”

More than 2,000 people have been killed since mid-April.

Similarly, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported Wednesday that “whatever the questions over the Kremlin’s intentions with regard to the convoy, there seems to be little doubt that civilians in Luhansk are in need of aid, much more so than in Donetsk, the biggest city still under rebel control.”

The 425,000 population of Luhansk is down by half. The city has been without running water, electricity and telecommunications for almost a fortnight, and is “no longer supplied with food, medicine or fuel.” With the city and its neighbouring towns subject to almost continuous bombing, the BBC cites accounts of people having to “bury the dead in yards and gardens because infrastructure had collapsed and it was too dangerous to travel.”

The city of Donetsk—previously home to one million people—is besieged, with reports of residential homes and a hospital destroyed by Ukrainian shelling. *Euronews* wrote: “Fierce fighting, involving artillery, tanks, mortar bombardments, air strikes and missile attacks, has left many communities in ruins, with untold numbers of civilian casualties.”

The operation against Donetsk is being led by the

Azov Battalion, financed by Ukrainian oligarch Igor Kolomoisky. The militia, which models itself on Hitler’s storm troopers, is headed by Andriy Biletsky, leader of the white-supremacist Social National Assembly.

Amid reports of routine “punishment” operations by the militia against those suspected of opposing Kiev, Ukrainian radio station NRCU quoted Biletsky stating that the operations in Donetsk and Luhansk would take weeks to accomplish. “It’s going to be an extremely difficult and painful operation,” he said.

In reality, the aid convoy is the very least that Moscow could do under conditions where Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine are being subject to such repression. *Time* magazine described it as an attempt to call the “Western bluff”, while assuaging popular concern in Russia at events across the border.

Thus far, President Vladimir Putin has been careful regarding any action that might jeopardise his own support base amongst Russia’s oligarchs—not least because the Western powers are calculating that the impact of economic sanctions on this layer will aid their goal of regime-change.

Moscow has said it has accepted all of Kiev’s conditions, including the convoy’s route, the use of Ukrainian license plates once across the border, and the presence of international monitors and representatives of the Ukrainian government.

Nevertheless, the situation is in danger of escalating into an all-out military conflict involving nuclear powers.

More than one month on, the fatal crash of Malaysia MH17, with the loss of all 298 passengers and crew—the original pretext for Western sanctions—barely rates a mention. Having failed to supply the supposed proof that Russia was responsible for the crash, and with the official investigation not expected to report for weeks, the stand-off over Russia’s aid convoy looks set to be the latest casus belli for the West’s war plans.



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