

Kiev's blocking of Russian aid convoy to east Ukraine escalates risk of war

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International tensions continued to mount throughout the day yesterday, as Ukrainian officials began inspecting a convoy of humanitarian aid that Russia hopes to send to the besieged city of Luhansk, which is held by pro-Russian separatists hostile to the pro-US regime in Kiev. The convoy of 280 trucks, which left for Ukraine on Tuesday, has been stalled at the Ukrainian border just outside the city of Izvaryne, as fighting intensifies across east Ukraine.

Russia agreed to allow a team of Ukrainian border guards to inspect the 2,000 tons of aid before passing across the border and on to Luhansk. US and NATO officials had made threatening statements earlier in the week that they would consider the passage of a Russian aid convoy into Ukraine without permission from Kiev to be an invasion.

The government in Kiev has stipulated that the Russia convoy not be accompanied by any sort of defensive personnel or equipment, under the pretense of ensuring that the convoy is not a cover for a military intervention.

According to the Pentagon, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu assured US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in a phone call on Friday that no Russian troops were involved in the convoy, that it would not be used as a pretext for further intervention, and that Russia was doing everything it could to meet the Ukrainian regime's demands.

Russia's agreement to the Kiev regime's demands has left the convoy vulnerable to attack from Ukrainian armed forces and fascist gangs which have been active in the attacks on Luhansk and Donetsk.

Moscow claimed on Friday to have uncovered a plot by the paramilitary Aidar Battalion to disrupt the humanitarian convoy. They allegedly planned to place mines along the pre-planned route to Luhansk and place

the blame on the pro-Russian separatists.

Also on Friday, NATO accused Russia of dispatching a convoy of armored personnel carriers into rebel-held territory Thursday night, raising the prospect of war. The secretary-general of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said that the alliance had indications of an incursion of vehicles from Russia. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko then released a statement claiming that Ukrainian forces had launched an attack and successfully destroyed part of the Russian convoy.

The claims of NATO and Poroshenko have yet to be independently verified and have been flatly denied by Moscow as fabrications.

Reports of a Russian incursion have been seized on by the Western imperialist powers to ratchet up tensions and threaten war. The European Union released a provocative statement calling on Russia "to put an immediate stop to any form of border hostilities, in particular to the flow of arms, military advisors and armed personnel into the conflict region and to withdraw its forces from the border."

British Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond summoned the Russian ambassador and warned that "if there are any Russian military personnel or vehicles in eastern Ukraine they need to be withdrawn immediately or the consequences could be very serious."

The Kiev regime's decision to block the aid convoy testifies to the utter ruthlessness with which it is pursuing its campaign of collective punishment against the population of east Ukraine, now allegedly including using the chemical weapon white phosphorus against the city of Donetsk.

Kiev has unleashed a group of fascist militias to besiege and shell the two major cities of southeastern Ukraine, killing over 2,000 people and wounding thousands. The Kiev regime's shelling of Donetsk has

killed more than 80 civilians and wounded at least 116. Just since Thursday, shelling has killed eleven civilians and injured eight others in the city.

The situation is even worse in the besieged city of Luhansk, where residents have been without electricity, running water or telephone service for nearly two weeks. People risk being torn to bits by mortar fire as they wait in long lines for food and water.

The city's hospital is desperately low on basic medical supplies, including insulin and tuberculosis medicine, and water treatment facilities have run out of chemicals to disinfect water.

At the same time, Western officials have maintained a total silence on videos that emerged yesterday showing the Ukrainian military bombing the rebel-held east Ukrainian city of Donetsk with white phosphorus. Such a bombing directly violates the Geneva Conventions and other international treaties.

Reports that Kiev regime forces had used white phosphorus bombs had already emerged during the siege of the rebel-held city of Slavyansk in June. Residents told Russian media that a number of buildings as well as open ground in the suburb of Semyonovka had been set ablaze by the incendiary bombs. The ground hit by white phosphorus continued to burn for nearly an hour after it was hit.

White phosphorus when used as an incendiary weapon can cause especially severe second-and third-degree burns, melting through skin, and can cause fatal organ failure if ingested or inhaled. The Geneva Conventions as well as Article One of Protocol III of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons forbid the use of incendiary weapons against civilians or in civilian areas.

The devastating effects of white phosphorus have made it a favored weapon of US imperialism and its allies in recent years for brutally suppressing civilian populations. Israel admitted to deploying white phosphorous incendiary bombs against civilian areas in Gaza during its Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009.

The American military deployed white phosphorous in 2004 against civilians in the city of Fallujah in Iraq as it stormed the city in an attempt to crush its resistance to the US occupation. Residues from white phosphorus and other toxic materials used by the US military have contributed to an alarming rise in birth defects in babies born since 2004 in the city.



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