

US, allies blast Russia for attacking Al Qaeda in Syria

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In a joint statement Friday, Washington and its allies in the war for regime change in Syria issued a condemnation of Russia's recent airstrikes in that country, demanding that Moscow confine any military action to attacks on Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) targets.

"These military actions constitute a further escalation and will only fuel more extremism and radicalization," the statement warned.

This essential message was echoed by French President Francois Hollande, who met Friday with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Paris. Russia, Holland declared, must "only hit" ISIS.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who appeared together with Hollande following a summit meeting on the crisis in Ukraine, which was also attended by Putin, stated, "Both of us insisted on the fact that IS [ISIS] is the enemy we should be fighting."

These warnings and condemnations came as Russian warplanes carried out a third day of strikes, hitting targets in Raqqa, the de facto capital of the ISIS-controlled region of Syria in the east, as well as Islamist "rebel" position further west, including in Darat al-Izza, a town in western Aleppo, and Maarat al-Nu'man, in Idlib province.

Speaking in Paris, Putin said that Russia's actions in Syria were directed against "ISIL [ISIS], Al-Nusra Front and others."

"The main targets are Daesh [the Arab acronym for ISIS] groups situated closest to Damascus," Alexei Pushkov, a top Russian Foreign Ministry official, said. He added that the Russian airstrikes could continue for up to four months.

What is most notable about the joint statement by the US and its allies, as well as remarks made in appearances by Western officials and in the coverage of

the controversy in the corporate-controlled media, is the reluctance to state who it is that is being defended against Russian attack.

There have been vague references to "the moderate Sunni opposition," which President Barack Obama invoked at a White House press conference Friday. He used the same appearance to accuse Moscow of waging a "campaign to simply try to destroy anybody who is disgusted and fed up with Mr. Assad's behavior."

In reality, the forces on the ground that the US and its allies are defending and which they are demanding that Russia stop bombing are dominated by the Al-Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate.

Some media accounts have referred to Russian bombs hitting the positions of Jaysh al-Fatah, or Army of Conquest, in Syria's northwest province of Idlib. This "army" consists of a coalition of Al-Nusra and other Al Qaeda-connected Islamist militias that are backed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. After massacring Druze villagers in Idlib, they are threatening to move into Latakia province, which is predominantly Alawite and has been a key base of support for Assad, and where Russia's main military forces have been deployed.

Darat al-Izza, the town in western Aleppo hit by Russian bombs, is also controlled by a similar coalition dominated by Al-Nusra fighters.

This is to whom Obama was referring when he declared at his press conference that Russia "doesn't distinguish between ISIL and a moderate Sunni opposition that wants to see Mr. Assad go... From their perspective, they're all terrorists, and that's a recipe for disaster."

From Washington's own perspective, Al-Nusra was also terrorist; at least it was three years ago when the Obama administration added the group to the State

Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations. At that time, the State Department cited hundreds of attacks by Al-Nusra, including suicide bombings, in which it said "numerous innocent Syrians have been killed." The ruling found that Al-Nusra was merely another name for Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Three years later, it is clear that Washington is in what constitutes, at the very least, a de facto alliance with Al-Nusra, which, alongside ISIS, constitutes the most powerful anti-Assad militia. US arms funneled in to CIA-backed "rebels" have largely ended up in Al-Nusra's stockpiles, while the minuscule number of "vetted rebels" trained and armed by the Pentagon in its notoriously failed program have, virtually to a man, defected to Al-Nusra or turned their weapons over to the militia.

Former US General David Petraeus, who headed the CIA and commanded US forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan, last month urged Washington to further its position on the ground in Syria by recruiting sections of the Al-Nusra Front as US proxy troops against the Assad government.

"It might be possible at some point to peel off so-called 'reconcilables' who would be willing to renounce Nusra and align with the moderate opposition...to fight against Nusra, ISIL and Assad," Petraeus said during an interview with CNN.

After 14 years of invoking Al Qaeda terrorism as the all-purpose bogeyman for justifying wars abroad and repression at home, Washington is now coming to the defense of the group in Syria, seeking to preserve it as a military force for overthrowing the Syrian government and thereby weakening both Russia and Iran.

Russia's intervention is unquestionably directed at preventing the fall of the Syrian government to the onslaught of attacks by Islamist Sunni sectarian militias armed to the teeth and funded with billions of dollars by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Western powers, all under the guiding hand of the US Central Intelligence Agency.

The airstrikes ordered by Moscow are ratcheting up the threat of military confrontation with the US, which is continuing to conduct its own bombing raids in Syria together with a "coalition" consisting primarily of the reactionary Sunni oil sheikdoms. France has also begun its own independent air campaign over its former colonial possession.

Moreover, the Russian intervention cannot provide a progressive way out of the Syrian crisis, directed as it is toward the defense of the interests of the Russian state and the parasitic and criminal class of post-Soviet oligarchs that it represents.

Nonetheless, for Washington and its allies to condemn Russia for military "escalation" and acting to "fuel extremism and radicalization" in Syria is the height of hypocrisy.

The brutal civil war that has claimed the lives of up to 300,000 Syrians and turned many millions more into refugees and displaced persons was instigated, funded and armed by the US, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Western powers. They sought to repeat the "success" registered by the US-NATO war in Libya, which ended in the toppling and murder of its secular leader Muammar Gaddafi and the plunging of the country into a bloody war between rival militias and governments, along with economic, political and social disintegration that continues to this day.

Meanwhile, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are reported to have organized the shipment of planeloads of weapons to Turkish airbases for distribution to the Sunni Islamist militias.

The reactionary oil monarchies are demanding that the Syrian civil war end in the deposing of Assad and the installation of a puppet regime more amenable to their interests.

While voicing support for a negotiated settlement, Washington's aim also remains regime change, placing it and Russia, the world's two largest nuclear powers, on a collision course.



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