With US backing, France launches bombing campaign in Syria

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The G-20 summit of world political leaders being held in Turkey to discuss the economic issues impacting on the world economy has been turned into a council of war. The major imperialist powers are moving rapidly to escalate their military intervention in Syria in the wake of Friday night's terror attack in Paris.

Yesterday evening French fighter jets carried out their biggest raid on Syria. It was launched simultaneously from the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, dropping 20 bombs on the Syrian city of Raqqa, reportedly targeting an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) command centre, a munitions depot and a training camp. The operation was carried out in coordination with US forces.

Earlier, Ben Rhodes, the US deputy national security adviser, said he was confident that in the "coming days and weeks" the US and France would "intensify our strikes against [ISIS] … to make clear there is no safe haven for these terrorists."

Speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press," Rhodes said there would be an "intensification" of US military efforts and "what we are doing here at the G-20 is seeking to gain additional contributions from some of our partners so we can bring more force to bear on that effort."

Demands are being brought forward from within the American military and political establishment for a major escalation in US action, regardless of the consequences.

Texas Senator Ted Cruz, a Republican candidate for president, said that ISIS would "not be deterred by targeted air strikes with zero tolerance for civilian casualties, when the terrorists have such utter disregard for innocent life."

His call for vastly stepped-up US military action, without any regard for the consequences for the civilian population already devastated by the US-inspired civil war, were echoed by California Democrat, Dianne Feinstein, who sits on the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"It has become clear," Feinstein said, "that limited air strikes and support for Iraqi forces and the Syrian opposition are not sufficient to protect our country and our allies."

Retired Navy admiral James Stavridis, who served as NATO's top commander in Europe from 2009 to 2013, called for direct NATO intervention in Syria and Iraq.

"Soft power and playing the long game matter in the Middle East, but there is a time for the ruthless application of hard power. This is that time, and NATO should respond militarily against the Islamic State with vigor," Stavridis said.

During the first day of the G-20 summit, US President Barack Obama held a 35-minute discussion with Russian President Vladimir Putin in what the White House described as "constructive" talks.

The meeting followed an agreement by a meeting of the foreign ministers of the 17-member International Syria Support Group in Vienna on Saturday to work towards a ceasefire in Syria and the holding of elections under United Nations auspices within two years. The group, which includes the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, issued a statement that a "common understanding" had been reached in key issues.

The subsequent discussions between Obama and Putin at the G-20 were held as part of the US objective of sidelining, if not completely removing, Russian support for the Syrian regime of president Bashar al-Assad.

Under the agreement, following a ceasefire, a process

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would be set in motion to establish “inclusive and non-sectarian” governance, the drafting of a new constitution and the holding of elections under UN supervision within 18 months.

However, the crucial sticking point remains the future of Assad. In an interview on the eve of the G-20 summit, Putin said other nations had no right to demand that Assad leave office and that “only those who believe in their exceptionality [a thinly-veiled reference to the US] allow themselves to act in such a manner and impose their will on others.”

The US has been waging a campaign since 2011 for the overturn of the Assad government as part of its regime-change operations in the Middle East, in order to bring the region under its control. Russia has backed Assad in order to protect its strategic interests in the region, including a naval facility in Syria.

The US has made clear that as far as it is concerned there can be no resolution without Assad’s ouster—a position repeated by Obama’s National Security Adviser Susan Rice. She said a “transition regime” had to come to power “and it’s very hard to envision how that could be accomplished with Assad still in power.”

These remarks make clear that while the stepped up military offensive is being conducted under the banner of a “war” against ISIS, the real target is the Assad regime, which both the US and France want to see overturned.

Other imperialist powers are also preparing to intervene. British Prime Minister David Cameron indicated his intention to seek parliamentary backing for the use of British forces. The UK refused to back the US in August–September 2013 over plans to attack Syria, causing Obama to pull back and accept a Russian intervention to destroy Syrian chemical weapons.

“It’s becoming even more clear that our safety and security depends on degrading and ultimately destroying Isil [ISIS] whether it’s in Iraq or Syria,” Cameron said.

Following the talks with Obama at the G-20, a spokesman for Putin said that, while it was too early to speak of a rapprochement, there was need for “unity” in the fight against terror.

This was met with what the *Financial Times* described as “thinly disguised scorn” on the part of EU Council President Donald Tusk. “We need not only more co-operation but also more goodwill, especially from Russian action on the ground in Syria. It must be focused more on Islamic state and not … against the moderate Syrian opposition,” he said.

The “moderate Syrian opposition” is a mythical being created by imperialist politicians and a compliant media. The forces opposed to the Assad regime are dominated by groups such as Al Nusra, spawned by Al Qaeda, from which ISIS also developed. The fictional character of the so-called “moderates” was exposed earlier this year when it was revealed that, despite an expenditure of millions of dollars for the purpose of military training, the US was only able to find four or five people who could fall into that category.

The Paris terror attack is a terrible blow-back consequence of US operations in the Middle East. The statements emanating from imperialist world leaders and the discussions at the G-20 make clear that terror attacks resulting from yesterday’s crimes are rapidly being employed for the commission of new ones.

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