

After Paris attacks, NATO powers press for military escalation in Syria

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The military escalation being launched by the NATO powers and Russia in Syria, in the aftermath of Friday's mass terror attacks by the Islamic State (IS) in Paris, is both bloody and reckless.

French President François Hollande is presenting this offensive as the result of a newly-assembled international united front against IS including NATO, its Middle Eastern allies, and Russia. In line with Hollande's announcement in his speech Monday that he was seeking a "grand coalition" against IS including the United States and Russia, it was announced yesterday that Hollande will travel to meet both Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin next week.

In fact, Hollande's supposed anti-IS coalition is a political fiction: the foreign policies of the coalition's members clash wildly, and most support IS or its allies. The NATO powers have backed Islamist militias in a proxy war for regime change in Syria and to undermine the global influence of Russia, the Syrian regime's most powerful ally.

There is every danger that the new war drive being mounted ostensibly against IS could spread beyond Syria, if the forces jointly bombing IS began bombing each other. France is committing itself, on paper at least, both to NATO's ongoing military build-up against Russia in Eastern Europe and Ukraine, and to seeking a military alliance with Moscow in Syria. This points to the enormous danger of war facing not only the people of Syria, but of the entire world.

Yesterday, French and Russian forces launched numerous attacks on IS targets in Syria. In the morning, French fighters struck Raqqa, the capital of the region of Syria held by IS, dropping 16 bombs on IS facilities, including a command post. There were initial reports of another French raid on Raqqa last night.

Kremlin sources said Hollande and Putin had called

each other to discuss "closer ties and joint operations between the military command and intelligence services of Russia and France in Syria."

Russia fired long-range cruise missiles on Raqqa and announced the deployment of its strategic bomber force. Russian President Vladimir Putin also ordered Russian warships, now operating out of the Syrian port of Latakia, to coordinate operations with the French aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, which is leaving port in France to steam for the eastern Mediterranean tomorrow.

"The French naval group, led by the aircraft carrier, will soon reach your area of operations. We need to establish direct contact with it, and treat it as an ally. We need to develop a joint action plan for both sea and air operations," Putin said yesterday.

This is a 180-degree turnaround, in the space of just two years, in relations between the French and Russian militaries. In September 2013, as France followed Washington's war drive against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which was called off just days before bombing was set to begin, French warships faced off in the Mediterranean against Russian warships trying to protect Assad.

It appears, however, that Washington is not prepared to fully follow Paris in its current shift. Speaking to Reuters yesterday, an anonymous US defense official bluntly said, "We do not coordinate or collaborate in any way with Russia or its activities in Syria."

Visiting Hollande at the Elysée presidential palace in Paris yesterday, US Secretary of State John Kerry also declined to endorse military coordination with Russia, insisting that this required first a political agreement on the war. Syria, Kerry said, could be "weeks away, conceivably, from a big transition."

Significantly, as he rejected the French government's

strategy, America's chief diplomat pointed explicitly to the risk of fighting breaking out among the major powers.

“At the moment, it's a matter of making certain we are hitting the right targets and we are not running any risk of conflict among ourselves,” he said. “But it's possible that if the political process moves more rapidly, there could be a greater level of exchange of information and so forth. ... So the faster Russia and Iran give life to this process, the faster the violence can taper down, and we can isolate [IS] and Al Nusra and begin to do what our strategy has always set out to do.”

Kerry was apparently referring to a series of diplomatic initiatives between the NATO powers and Russia, as Putin signals that he may press Assad to reach a power-sharing deal with some of the Islamist opposition militias in Syria, allowing them to unite against IS. On Saturday, in talks on the margins of the G20 summit in Vienna, Obama and Putin reportedly reached a consensus on “a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition” to end the Syrian war.

On Monday, Putin declared, “A part of the Syrian opposition considers it possible to begin military action against IS with the assistance of the Russian air forces, and we are ready to provide that assistance.” He called for the opposition forces and the Assad regime to “consolidate” their efforts against IS.

In fact, NATO and the Kremlin are incapable of finding any progressive resolution to the proxy war stoked by NATO against Assad in Syria. Divided by rising geo-strategic and economic conflicts, they face a war that has claimed nearly a quarter million lives and forced over 10 million people to flee their homes. Previous wars in which such regimes were targeted by US-led interventions, including the war against the pro-Soviet Afghan regime in the 1980s or against Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, ended as the country dissolved into civil war.

The only way forward for the working class is to mobilize in struggle against the war policies of the NATO imperialist powers, which the Kremlin is working to support. They have not only created a disaster by backing Islamist militias in Syria that are now carrying out attacks worldwide, but they are exploiting it to press home deep attacks on democratic rights.

Today, French officials will begin presenting

proposed changes to the French constitution designed to allow French President François Hollande to rule France indefinitely under a state of emergency.

Last night, German officials canceled an exhibition game in Hanover between the German and Dutch national teams, due to a bomb threat. French intelligence had also reportedly warned German officials of the danger of an attack against the game. The stadium was shut down as police searched for a bomb and mounted a massive security operation in the area.

As of early this morning, however, it was unclear whether any bomb was in fact present, after officials denied an earlier newspaper report saying that security officials had found an ambulance stuffed full of explosives, apparently designed to be used as a truck bomb.

German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere spoke at a rapidly-convened press conference but bluntly refused to give any details as to what had occurred.

“I can understand all the questions relating to what was the background, what could have happened, why we had to call the game off, what made the decision so clear,” de Maiziere said. “I can understand these questions, but please understand that I would not like to give an answer...I would just like to ask the German public to trust us, the Interior Ministry, that we had good reasons to make this decision, but it does not help for us to provide any further details.”



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