

More than 100 killed in ISIS suicide bombings in Syria

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The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) claimed responsibility for multiple bomb blasts which ripped through residential neighborhoods in the Syrian cities of Homs and Damascus on Sunday, leaving more than 100 people dead and wounding hundreds of others.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, twin car bombs ripped through an Alawite-majority district loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, killing at least 67 people and wounded at least 100 others.

As many as four explosions were reported in southern Damascus near the Shiite Sayyidah Zaynab Mosque. At least 50 people were killed and 200 injured when ISIS militants detonated a car bomb and then set off explosive belts.

The devastating attacks came just hours after US Secretary of State John Kerry announced that an agreement had been reached with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov for the “cessation of hostilities” in Syria, for the second time in less than two weeks.

“We have reached a provisional agreement, in principle, on the terms of the cessation of hostilities that could begin in the coming days,” Kerry told reporters in Amman, Jordan after speaking to Lavrov via telephone. He stated that US President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin would speak in the coming days to discuss a way of implementing the deal.

Ominously, Kerry warned that the only alternative to a ceasefire agreement would be “the complete destruction of Syria itself.” He reiterated that the conflict would only end once Assad was removed from power, stating, “With Assad there, this war cannot and will not end.”

Earlier this month, the secretary of state had warned in an interview with the *Washington Post* of a “Plan

B,” i.e., a dramatic escalation of US military operations, if Russia and Iran did not adhere to US dictates for a ceasefire.

The deadline for the implementation of a ceasefire, worked out more than a week ago between the American-led coalition and Russia in Munich, passed last Friday with no respite in fighting.

The five-year-old conflict has been fueled by the United States and its allies, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, with the aim of overthrowing Syrian President Assad, a key ally of Russia and Iran in the Middle East.

The CIA and intelligence agencies in Saudi Arabia and Turkey have funneled fighters, weaponry and money to support forces the Obama administration has defined as “moderate,” including the Al Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front and the Islamist militia Ahrar al-Sham.

ISIS is itself a direct outgrowth of the bloody US regime-change operations in both Syria and Iraq, and has been used to justify daily bombing raids throughout Syria along with the deployment of US Special Forces.

As Kerry made clear in his statements on Sunday, ongoing US military operations in Syria, couched in terms of the so-called War on Terror and the fight against ISIS, are aimed ultimately at the ouster of Assad and the establishment of a pliant pro-Western puppet government.

The US and its allies have sought some sort of ceasefire agreement with Moscow to allow for its proxy forces to regroup, because Russian airstrikes in support of Assad’s military forces have been increasingly effective in driving back the rebel groups backed by the US and Saudi Arabia in recent weeks.

These developments increasingly threaten to bring the US and Russia, the two largest nuclear powers in the

world, into direct conflict with one another on the ground and in the air in Syria.

In the last month, the Syrian army with Russian support, has been able to seize control of strategic portions of the northern city of Aleppo from rebel militias, including the al-Nusra Front, and cut off a key military supply route from Turkey.

In November, NATO member Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet along the Turkish-Syrian border in a deliberately provocative action.

In recent days, Turkish officials have been warning of plans to invade northern Syria, motivated by a desire to halt the advance of Syrian Kurdish forces, which have been consolidating their control over portions of northern Syria with US and Russian support.

On Saturday, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan insisted that Turkey had the right to intervene militarily in Syria and elsewhere to defend itself from “terror organizations.”

Turkey has blamed the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) for a bombing attack last week in Ankara which killed 28 people, including 20 high-ranking soldiers.

According to *Hurriyet*, Erdogan made the remarks at a UNESCO meeting in the southern city of Gaziantep, just 60 miles north of Aleppo, stating, “Turkey has every right to conduct operations in Syria and the places where terror organizations are nested with regards to the struggle against the threats that Turkey faces.”

“No one can restrict Turkey’s right to self-defense in the face of terror acts that have targeted Turkey,” Erdogan warned.

Syrian society has been devastated by the imperialist stoked civil war over the last five years. The UN estimates that nearly 5 million Syrians have registered as refugees in neighboring countries, with millions more internally displaced.

According to a recent report released by the Syrian Center for Policy Research, since 2011 at least 470,000 people have been killed in Syria as a direct or indirect result of the fighting. The report found that 11.5 percent of the pre-war Syrian population has either been killed or wounded. Overall life expectancy has dropped from 70.5 years in 2010 to 55.4 years in 2015.

Eurostat estimates that more than 250,000 Syrians applied for asylum in Europe between 2014 and 2015.

Over the last year thousands of asylum seekers, many of them Syrian, have drowned seeking to reach Europe by crossing either the Mediterranean Sea or the Aegean Sea, as part of the greatest refugee crisis since World War II.



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