

Civilian deaths in Syria surge as US-Russian brokered ceasefire unravels

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More than 200 civilians, including 35 children, were killed as military violence erupted across Syria this week, leaving the ceasefire agreement brokered by US and Russian diplomats in February in tatters.

The renewed fighting, the latest upsurge in a war that has already killed more than 400,000 people, is pushing Syria deeper into conditions of social collapse. Recent days have witnessed a “catastrophic deterioration” in the security situation, with violence across Syria “soaring back to the levels we saw prior to the cessation of hostilities,” and military forces displaying a “monstrous disregard” for civilians, according to UN human rights official Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein.

Syria’s social and health infrastructure has been devastated by more than five years of the US-orchestrated war for regime change. “Almost half of Syria’s ambulances have been destroyed; more than one-third of its hospitals no longer function; and the flow of pharmaceutical imports has slowed to a trickle,” Debarati Guha-Sapir of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters said Friday.

More than 346 medical facilities have been subject to strikes during the Syrian war, according to Physicians for Human Rights. On Wednesday, air strikes of unknown origin destroyed the Medicines sans Frontiers-linked (MSF) al-Quds medical center in Aleppo, killing at least 50 civilians and two MSF doctors. Both US and Russian military spokesmen denied responsibility for the strikes.

The surging violence has centered on Aleppo, where some 250,000 civilians are trapped under siege conditions, living amid the ruins of a city already decimated by five years of war. Only one remaining commercial thoroughway, controlled by US-backed Islamist militias, connects the city to the rest of the country, and the population now faces stepped-up

attacks from gunships and artillery.

In contrast to the US media and the political establishment’s endless denunciations of Russia’s intervention in Syria, the essential cause for the breakdown of the cease-fire and slide back toward all-out civil and proxy war is the uncompromising determination of the US ruling class to overthrow the Assad government, toppling a crucial regional ally of both Russia and Iran and replacing it with an American puppet.

On Monday, the White House announced that at least 250 US special forces soldiers would be deployed to Syria, a decision taken on the heels of the announcement of an additional 200 US ground troops to Iraq.

In testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee Thursday, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter made clear that these are only preliminary moves in a much broader war plan.

“Based on the results we’ve had, and our desire to continue accelerating ISIL’s lasting defeat, we are conducting the ‘next plays’ of the military campaign,” Carter said.

In the coming weeks, US-backed Iraqi national forces will “leverage Apache attack helicopters” in support of their offensive against the northern city of Mosul, where hundreds of US Marines are already carrying out artillery bombardments against surrounding villages.

In Syria, US commandos are working to establish bases of operations that will enable further special operations deployments by US-aligned governments in Europe and the Persian Gulf. They will seek to “train and equip motivated local anti-ISIS forces, especially among the Sunni Arab community,” Carter said.

Beyond Iraq and Syria, the US is preparing a range of “counter-ISIS” operations, including in South and

Southeast Asia, Yemen and West Africa, Carter said.

The US military aims to “collapse ISIL’s control of Mosul and Raqqa by bringing to bear in support of them the full might of the US military,” Carter said.

The Pentagon, with full backing from the White House, is moving forward with the so-called US Plan B for Syria.

As Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook declared on Monday, the US military will “continue to look at every single opportunity we have, working with our local partners, to see how we can accelerate this campaign.”

American support for the ceasefire was, all along, a tactical maneuver, aimed at buying time for US forces to prepare a renewed push, under conditions where Russian-backed Syrian and Iranian forces have increasingly routed the US-backed insurgency, threatening to derail the regime-change operation launched by Washington in 2011.

The escalation of US ground wars in Iraq and Syria, coming despite President Obama’s repeated promises that the renewed US war in Iraq and Syria, launched in 2014 as “Operation Inherent Resolve,” would not see US “boots on the ground,” is being carried out with the backing of the entire Democratic Party establishment.

The most recent escalations were hailed this week by both US Democratic Party presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders.

Senator Clinton, who has previously criticized the White House for not waging a more “robust” war in Syria and demanded expansions of the US air and ground wars, including the establishment of a “no fly zone,” issued a campaign statement supporting the White House’s authorization of an expanded commando war in Syria.

Last November, Clinton delivered a bellicose address to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), declaring that, in Syria, “a more effective coalition air campaign is necessary, but not sufficient.”

“Air strikes would have to be combined with ground forces,” Clinton said, calling for a ground invasion to carve out “safe zones” along with the imposition of a “no fly zone” throughout Syrian airspace.

In addition to a general expansion of US war-making throughout the Middle East, Africa and Asia, Clinton’s “plan to defeat ISIS” calls for expanded surveillance of social media globally.

Senator Sanders’ own endorsement of the administration’s policies makes clear that he is not in any sense running as an anti-war candidate, but rather as another imperialist politician.

“The president is talking about having American troops training Muslim troops, and helping supply the military equipment they need. I do support that effort,” Sanders told media this week.

The preparations for an expanded US ground war in Syria, whose full character will likely not be revealed until immediately after the 2016 US elections, are taking place amid US war preparations in Eastern Europe, the South China Sea and throughout Eurasia, that pose the growing threat of a third world war.



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