

Kerry charges “war crimes” as US escalates tensions with Russia

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Washington and its allies have deliberately escalated tensions with Moscow amid growing signs that a Russian-backed offensive by Syrian government forces is on the brink of overrunning US-backed, Al Qaeda-affiliated “rebels” in eastern Aleppo.

US Secretary of State John Kerry Friday called for Russia and the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad to be investigated for “war crimes” in relation to strikes carried out by Syrian and Russian warplanes against the Islamist militias.

Referring to an alleged overnight bombing of a hospital, Kerry declared: “These are acts that beg for an appropriate investigation of war crimes. They’re beyond the accidental now, way beyond, years beyond the accidental. This is a targeted strategy to terrorize civilians and to kill anybody and everybody who is in the way of their military objectives.”

Later in the day a spokesman admitted that the State Department had been unable to confirm Kerry’s charge, stating that “whether or not there was a strike last night in a hospital or Aleppo is kind of beside the point.”

Washington’s feigned shock and outrage over bloodshed in eastern Aleppo are belied by US support for and direct complicity in similar and worse war crimes in Yemen, where the United Nations has reported over 10,000 killed, largely as a result of a bombing campaign by a Saudi Arabian-led coalition that is armed by and receives indispensable intelligence and logistical aid from the Pentagon. UN officials have warned that the US-backed war in that country is threatening much of the population with starvation.

Nor, for that matter, has Kerry or any other US official shown any inclination to back war crimes investigations into Washington’s illegal war of aggression against Iraq, which claimed over one million lives and laid the groundwork for the bloody conflicts that have since erupted throughout the region.

It is also noteworthy that Kerry voiced no concern for the killing and terrorizing of civilians in government-controlled western Aleppo, where the vast majority of the population lives. US-backed “rebels” have carried out continuous terror attacks on the area with rockets, mortars and “hell cannon,” as well as chemical weapons, killing hundreds.

Kerry’s rhetorical attack was mounted for propaganda purposes. There is no likelihood that Russia, which wields veto power on the United Nations Security Council, would accept a war crimes investigation into its bombing campaign in Syria, any more than Washington would allow such a probe into the crimes carried out by US imperialism all over the world.

The US secretary of state made his remarks speaking alongside his French counterpart, Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, who stopped in Washington en route to the United Nations in New York City, where he is to press for the adoption of a Security Council resolution imposing a new ceasefire in Syria.

Like Kerry’s “war crimes” gambit, the French resolution is also intended for propaganda purposes, drafted in language that will ensure a Russian veto. It demands the imposition of a no-fly zone over Aleppo, compelling the grounding of all Russian and Syrian warplanes. Russia’s UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters Friday that the French resolution was unprecedented in its demand that a permanent member of the Security Council vote for a measure that restrains its own actions. A vote is supposed to go ahead during a Security Council session today.

The French resolution ignores the events that led to the breakdown of the last ceasefire deal, which was reached between the US and Russia on September 9. Before its definitive unraveling within barely one week, the ceasefire saw hundreds of violations by the so-called rebels, who continued attacking government positions,

while using the cessation of airstrikes and the government offensive to rearm and reposition their forces.

Moscow protested the unwillingness and inability of Washington to implement a key provision of the deal, which called for so-called “moderate” rebels backed by the US to separate themselves from the Al Qaeda-affiliated militias that are designated by the UN as terrorists and excluded from the ceasefire. What the agreement clearly confirmed was that such a separation is impossible as the Al Qaeda elements represent the backbone of the proxy forces employed by the US in its war for regime change in Syria.

Moscow’s reluctance to accept a new ceasefire deal is also bound up with the undeniable advances made by Syrian government forces in Aleppo, which represents the last stronghold of the Islamist militias in any major population center. Their defeat there will signal a strategic reversal for the five-and-a-half-year-old regime-change war.

This is what is driving the increasingly hysterical US rhetoric, as well as growing pressure from within the US military and intelligence apparatus for a qualitative escalation of the American intervention in Syria. These layers see such a reversal not merely as a debacle for the US intervention in Syria, but part of a broader pattern of both Russia and China obstructing US imperialism’s drive to assert global hegemony.

President Barack Obama is reportedly set to meet with his full National Security Council over this weekend to consider proposals for a military escalation in Syria. According to administration officials cited in the media, both US cruise missile strikes against Syrian government targets and the provision of more sophisticated weapons, including Manpad surface-to-air missiles, to the rebels have been proposed, with support from both the military’s Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said in a television interview Friday that Moscow’s decision to deploy a battery of S-300 missile defense systems to the Russian naval base at Tartus was taken in response to the reports from Washington that US airstrikes were being prepared.

The day before, Russia’s Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov issued a warning against the US targeting of Syrian government forces. “I would recommend our colleagues in Washington to carefully weigh possible consequences of the fulfillment of such plans,” he said.

Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook dismissed the warning, telling reporters, “We’ll continue to conduct our operations as we have for months now over Syria, and we’ll continue to do so taking every possible step we need to ensure the safety of our air crews.”

With growing signs that the US and Russia, the world’s two major nuclear powers, could be on the brink of a military confrontation in Syria, Washington has further ratcheted up tensions with the issuance Friday of a formal statement from the Director of National Intelligence and the Department of Homeland Security alleging that the Russian government was responsible for hacking the computers of the Democratic National Committee and other political entities in actions “intended to interfere with the US election process.”

Both the Democratic Party and administration officials have repeated unsubstantiated charges that the hacking was ordered by the government of President Vladimir Putin. These allegations have served to divert attention from the content of the leaked emails, which demonstrated that the Democratic Party leadership had sought to rig the primary process to ensure the victory of Hillary Clinton over her rival for the presidential nomination, Bernie Sanders.

The formal finding of Russian responsibility, which has been backed up by no evidence, may well lead to a new round of US sanctions against Moscow.

Meanwhile, in what amounted to an unmistakable and chilling warning to Russia, the US Air Force reported Thursday on an exercise staged earlier this month at the Tonopah Test Range in Nevada, where two B-2A Spirit stealth bombers dropped two B61 nuclear weapons, minus their warheads.

“The primary objective of flight testing is to obtain reliability, accuracy, and performance data under operational representative conditions,” the US National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) said of this dry run for nuclear war.



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