US bombs kill 11 civilians in Syria

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US airstrikes on a village north of the Syrian city of Raqqa killed at least 11 civilians, including four children and six women, a UK-based monitoring group reported Wednesday.

The bombing raid, which was launched just before midnight, is part of a protracted air war being waged by the US military that has killed and wounded thousands of civilians in both Syria and neighboring Iraq over the past three years.

In Syria, the airstrikes, ostensibly aimed against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), are being carried out without any authorization from either the United Nations or the government in Damascus, making them acts of aggression and war crimes.

The monitoring group Airwars has cited reports of as many as 13,407 civilians killed in both Iraq and Syria in 1,298 separate attacks by US and allied warplanes. The death toll has soared in the past few months as the Pentagon has provided massive air support to Iraqi government forces and militia groups besieging the northern city of Mosul, and carried out a parallel bombing campaign in conjunction with the advance of a force comprised primarily of the Kurdish YPG militia, backed by US special operations troops, against Raqqa in Syria.

The Pentagon has refused to acknowledge all but a handful of these killings—it recently raised its absurdly low estimate to 352—while the US media, which has churned out endless war propaganda over Syrian civilians killed in attacks by government forces and their Russian allies, has virtually ignored the bloodbath inflicted by Washington's air war.

The latest bombing, which struck the village of al-Salihiya, also severely wounded several civilians, with the death toll likely to rise. It follows by just days an earlier report of US bombs killing 10 civilians as they were driving through the desert southwest of Raqqa.

The stepped-up bombing raids have facilitated the YPG's overrunning of the town of Tabqa and a nearby strategic dam on the Euphrates River about 30 miles southwest of Raqqa, which ISIS proclaimed its Syrian capital after taking control of it in 2013, driving out or killing its substantial Alawite and Christian minority populations.

The YPG's conquest of Tabqa came just a day after the Pentagon announced that US President Donald Trump had authorized the direct arming of the Kurdish militia, a move that provoked heated protests from Turkey, Washington's NATO ally, which views it as a branch of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has fought the government in Ankara for Kurdish autonomy for over three decades. Late last month, Turkish warplanes attacked YPG positions in Syria, killing at least 20 of the militia's fighters. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is set to visit Washington beginning next Monday and has said he will appeal to Trump to reverse his decision.

Trump's meeting with the Turkish president will follow his White House talks Wednesday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. According to media reports, the substance of Trump's discussion with Lavrov centered largely on Syria, with the US president demanding that Moscow "rein in" both the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad and its closest ally, Iran.

Moscow has attempted to secure US support for an agreement reached earlier this month in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, between Russia, Turkey and Iran on the creation of four separate "de-escalation zones" in Syria, to halt fighting and airstrikes in areas under the control of the so-called "armed opposition," excluding ISIS and the group formerly known as the Al Nusra Front, Syria's Al Qaeda affiliate.

The Trump administration has remained noncommittal in relation to the zones, while the Pentagon has indicated that it has no intention of

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changing its air war because of the deal. Washington apparently orchestrated a protest and rejection of the zones by representatives of the so-called “rebels,” the Islamist forces armed and funded by the CIA, centering on Iran’s role in the agreement.

US imperialism is not interested in ending the conflict in Syria, but rather in stoking it in order to secure Washington’s original aim of regime change. The arming of the YPG is part of a steady escalation of the US intervention in Syria, which has seen the number of US troops operating in the country double over the past few months. Moreover, the Trump administration used the pretext of a chemical weapons attack, attributed without any substantive evidence to the Syrian government, to launch an attack that rained 59 cruise missiles on a Syrian government air base last month.

Meanwhile, US troops are participating in massive military exercises in Jordan, close to the Syrian border, prompting growing speculation that a US invasion may be in preparation. Photographs taken by Syrian drones have shown massed armor and large numbers of attack helicopters deployed near the border. Photographs also were posted on a “rebel” website appearing to show US special operations troops training a “moderate rebel” faction known as Mughawir al-Thowra in Syria’s al Tauf region near both the Jordanian and Iraqi borders.

While Washington escalates its intervention in Syria, the bloody US-backed siege of Iraq’s second largest city, Mosul, continues to grind on into its eighth month, with thousands of civilians killed and hundreds of thousands driven from their homes.

Some 600,000 Iraqis have fled the death and destruction unleashed by the offensive, while as many as 450,000 more remain trapped in the war zone, which is moving with increasing ferocity into Mosul’s crowded Old City.

The International Committee of the Red Cross warned Wednesday that those still inside Mosul were facing “very stark choices.”

“This population is not only exposed to the immediate dangers of the conflict itself and being either targeted or hit as collateral damage, but is also facing the effects of just no longer really having much access to the basic essentials that they need to live,” Peter Hamilton, the ICRC deputy director for the Middle East said Wednesday.

“People don’t have enough to eat, don’t have water,” Hamilton said. “Babies, elderly and so on of course they are very vulnerable and may already be dying.”

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