

Bomb blasts in Aleppo, Syria kill 28

By David Walsh
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Two bomb blasts in Aleppo, Syria's most populous city, killed at least 28 people and wounded some 235 on Friday. The government blamed the explosions set off outside intelligence and police offices on the Syrian armed opposition, which is backed by the Gulf states, the US and other Western powers.

At the scene of the first bombing, the Military Intelligence Directorate, Syrian state television showed images of shattered bodies, debris-filled streets, broken windows in nearby residences, and milling crowds. A television presenter asserted that children were among the victims of the bomb, which exploded near a park. "Civilians and members of the military were martyred and wounded in the terrorist explosions," state television claimed.

The second blast, apparently a suicide bombing, took place near a police headquarters in a different part of Aleppo. State television broadcasts reported that the explosion left a crater "several metres wide," according to the BBC, and blew a truck onto its side. "Emergency workers were shown holding up body parts."

Aleppo, in Syria's north and a major financial and commercial center, has been relatively quiet since the uprising against the regime of Bashir al-Assad began in March 2011. The *Wall Street Journal* notes that the city "has seen only occasional protests" in that time, and that Assad's opponents "have had little success in galvanizing support."

According to the *Journal*, the city's large Kurdish population has "mostly stayed on the sidelines of the uprising" since the regime began granting them citizenship.

Opposition groups disclaimed any responsibility for the bombings and blamed security forces for the blasts. The BBC commented, "After some confused statements, the rebel Free Syrian Army [FSA] denied that it was involved, but said it had a clash with security forces in the area shortly beforehand."

The FSA's Col. Malik al-Kurdi told the BBC that on Friday morning "two groups from the FSA targeted the two buildings with small arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire."

"After violent clashes, there was an explosion inside the Military Intelligence building. At first we didn't know what it was, but we think it was the regime trying to stop the operation of the FSA," al-Kurdi alleged.

The Free Syrian Army, a Sunni force based in Turkey, is backed and funded by the Turkish, Saudi and Qatari regimes. Right-wing US politicians, including US senators Joseph Lieberman, John McCain and Lindsey Graham, have called for its further arming.

The US and Western media insisted on placing Syrian government claims that the February 10 attacks were carried out by "armed terrorist gangs" in quotation marks. The mass media permits only opponents of US foreign policy to be labeled terrorists.

Meanwhile, opposition groups claim that Syrian forces are attempting to suppress rebels in Homs, an industrial center in the western part of the country, with a population of some 800,000 people. Syrian forces have allegedly shelled and fired on rebel-held parts of Homs over the past week. Anti-Assad forces allege that hundreds of people have been killed in the most recent assault.

The Associated Press reports claims by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights that Syrian armed forces "were going house to house detaining people" in the Inshaat district, which "is next to Baba Amr, a neighborhood that has been under rebel control for months. Activists said at least four people were killed in the shelling in Baba Amr on Friday."

The London-based Syrian Observatory is a dubious organization and the various media reports about deaths in Homs have to be taken with a grain of salt.

The Assad regime is a brutal one, which undoubtedly

carries out atrocities against its population. For decades it has collaborated, despite occasional “anti-imperialist” demagoguery, with the great powers in suppressing its own population and the Palestinian people. The government in Damascus collaborated with the Bush administration in the latter’s “rendition” program, in which detainees, including Maher Arar, a Canadian software engineer, were illegally sent to Syria to be savagely tortured as part of the “war or terror.”

The US and its allies, however, are not working to replace “dictatorship” with “democracy,” but one authoritarian regime with another, that will be more directly at the service of Western interests. The further isolation of Iran, one of Washington’s immediate targets, is a central goal of the present offensive against Assad.

The modus operandi of the CIA and other intelligence services should be clear by now, after the bloody experiences of Iraq and Libya in particular. A targeted regime is accused of “crimes against its own people,” a rebel opposition composed of “freedom fighters” is promoted, and repression, real or invented, is seized upon to justify “humanitarian intervention.”

Whoever bears responsibility for the bombings in Aleppo, the strategy of the opposition and its imperialist paymasters is to encourage further chaos and mayhem, including attacks on government troops and police, in hopes of provoking renewed repression by pro-Assad forces, which then, in turn, fuels the calls for a Western military assault to “protect the population.”

The depth of the “democratic” opposition to the Syrian government can be gauged by the character of the regimes lined up with the White House. On Friday, Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah, who heads one of the most right-wing and undemocratic regimes on the planet, denounced the failure of the anti-Assad resolution in the UN Security Council last weekend, the result of a veto by Russia and China.

In a brief televised address, Abdullah declared: “We are going through scary days and unfortunately what happened at the United Nations is absolutely regrettable.” The king, somewhat bizarrely, told his listeners, that “countries cannot rule the whole world ... The world is ruled by brains, by justice, by morals, and by fairness.”

In March 2011 the Saudi regime sent thousands of its troops into Bahrain, the tiny Persian Gulf island nation with a population half the size of Aleppo, to help repress popular opposition to the brutal dictatorship of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, an operation fully backed by the Obama administration. Hundreds of Bahrainis were jailed, beaten and tortured in the repression.

The Gulf Cooperation Council, composed of the monarchies of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, recently broke off diplomatic relations with Damascus to protest what they termed the “mass slaughter” in Homs.

Russian officials repeated their opposition Friday to the moves against Assad, a major ally in the region. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told the media that the Russian government would block any attempt to oust the present Syrian regime. “If our foreign partners don’t understand that, we will have to use strong means again and again to call them back to reality,” a Russian news agency quoted him as saying.

In Russia’s lower house of parliament, the State Duma, deputies unanimously passed a resolution criticizing the “imbalanced approach” of the failed UN resolution, which “undermines chances for fair and constructive dialogue.” The statement “highly condemns the practice of military meddling in other state’s affairs or forcing their own decision on them.”

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