

Washington denounces Russia, backs escalation of Syria war

By Alex Lantier
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Only hours after US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov unveiled a vague plan Friday for the “cessation of hostilities” in Syria, US allies pushed for a major escalation of the war, as leaders of many major states met at the Munich Security Conference (MSC).

On Saturday, Turkish and Saudi officials confirmed that they plan to begin bombing and launch a ground invasion of Syria. “Turkey and Saudi Arabia may launch an operation from the land,” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told *Yeni Safak*, adding that Saudi Arabia is “ready to send both jets and troops” to Incirlik air base in Turkey.

Washington has given these operations its blessing, though they threaten to unleash a war that could engulf the entire Middle East and escalate into world war. US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said Friday that he expected commandos from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to invade Syria. Carter claimed they would attack the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS); however, Turkey and Saudi Arabia support Sunni Islamist forces in Syria like ISIS, and their aim would be to destroy Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime.

Speaking to Germany’s *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* Friday night, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir personally threatened the Syrian president: “There will be no Bashar al-Assad in the future.”

The Iranian military, whose units are operating along Russian and Syrian government forces against NATO-backed Sunni Islamist groups, warned Sunday that they would respond to military escalation by Turkey and Saudi Arabia in kind. “We will not let the situation in Syria get out of control so that some rogue states could implement their policies. If needed, we will take some appropriate decisions,” declared Deputy

Chief of Staff Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev had already warned that Saudi ground operations could provoke a “new world war.” He told *Handelsblatt*, “A ground operation draws everyone taking part in it into a war ... The Americans and our Arab partners must consider whether or not they want a permanent war.”

As Russian bombings and Syrian offensives threaten to retake the city of Aleppo from the opposition, NATO and its allies are signaling that they are willing to launch staggeringly reckless escalations to ensure the defeat of Assad and Moscow. The main MSC panel Saturday erupted into arguments over Syria as Kerry and French Prime Minister Manuel Valls attacked Russia, warning that NATO would not allow its Islamist proxies to be beaten.

Kerry accused Moscow of “repeated aggression” in Syria, declaring, “To date, the vast majority, in our opinion, of Russia’s attacks have been against legitimate opposition groups.”

He continued: “Assad and his allies, including Russia, might believe that by defying the will of the international community, they can win the war. If that is what Russia and Assad think, then I believe they would have been missing the lessons of the last five years.” The US-backed opposition forces “may be pushed back here and there but they are not going to surrender,” Kerry said.

The French prime minister echoed Kerry’s hard line. “We know that to find the path to peace again, the Russian bombing of civilians has to stop,” Valls said.

Whatever the death toll caused by the Kremlin oligarchy’s air strikes in Syria, the criticisms of Kerry and Valls are hypocritical and false to the core. The central cause of the war, which has claimed 300,000 lives and forced 11 million Syrians to flee their homes,

is the drive of NATO and its Middle East allies to topple Assad. Sunni Islamist militias like Ahrar al-Sham or the Farouq Brigades, which they back as “moderate opposition” forces, in fact advocate the creation of Sunni theocracies and sectarian violence against Shia Muslims.

Medvedev, who sat next to Valls in the conference hall, replied by accusing him of fabricating his charges against Russia: “There is no evidence of our bombing civilians, even though everyone is accusing us of this.”

Medvedev then attacked NATO’s stance towards Russia as hostile, comparing the situation to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. “We have fallen into a new Cold War,” he said. “Nearly on a daily basis, we are being blamed for the most terrible threat to NATO as a whole, to Europe, to America, to other countries. They make scary movies where Russia starts a nuclear war. I sometimes wonder: are we in 2016 or 1962?”

Medvedev’s reference to the Cuban Missile Crisis, which nearly led to nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union, is not an idle one. Amid escalating crises between Russia and NATO—from Ukraine, the naval standoff in the Black Sea and the Baltic republics, to Syria—ever larger sections of military-diplomatic officialdom are concluding that all-out war between nuclear-armed powers is possible, or even inevitable.

The official conference document, the Munich Security Report 2016, made clear that world war is a possibility. It asserted, “for the first time since the end of the Cold War, the escalation of violence between major powers cannot be dismissed as an unrealistic nightmare.”

The fact that world leaders are bitterly arguing among themselves, while acknowledging that they are placing the world on the verge of wars that could annihilate humanity, testifies to the bankruptcy of the capitalist social order. Riven by social inequality and class tensions, torn apart by competition for profit and strategic advantage between the major powers, global capitalism has reached a dead end.

The leaders of the major imperialist powers, including the US, Germany, France and Britain, see no alternative to war. Thus MSC Chairman Wolfgang Ischinger declared in closing remarks to the conference, “There is a need for the use of military force to make and to enforce peace. It is sad that it is

so, but it is so.”

The conference report listed many regional issues as posing serious threats. It cited crises in Brazil and Turkey, the dissolution of the European Union, a British exit from the EU, “thinly veiled nuclear threats” in Eastern Europe, the need to find hundreds of millions of jobs for Africa’s rising population, and China’s rising economic and geo-strategic weight. The assembled officials are also increasingly aware of and concerned about the danger of social struggle: an upsurge of the working class from below.

Significantly, the report identified mass social anger as one of the “Top 10 Risks for 2016.” It fretted, “As slower growth and stagnating living standards stoke popular discontent, angry citizens will take to the streets.”

The conference also discussed the migrant crisis as hundreds of thousands of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi refugees flee war to Europe, where they have largely gone to Germany. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier used it to promote German remilitarization, a policy announced at the 2014 MSC.

“I think many of you were here two years ago, when we discussed the changing role of Germany and its responsibilities,” he observed. “Today we consider our responsibility in an absolutely different way: when the migration crisis started, we realized that this was about certain actions rather than abstract duties.”

This issue drew a reactionary retort from the French prime minister. Warning of a possible dissolution of the EU, Valls declared that Paris is “not favorable” to Berlin’s call for quotas to distribute refugees across the EU, and that France would agree to take in only 30,000 refugees.

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