

# US air raids kill more than 200 civilians in northern Syria

By Thomas Gaist  
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Airstrikes by the American-led war coalition killed as many as 212 civilians in Syria's northern province of Aleppo on Tuesday, according to estimates published Thursday by Al Jazeera.

The original civilian death toll produced by the strikes was reported to be 56. The strikes, which were allegedly carried out with significant support from the French military, "pulverized entire families, including young children," the Washington Post reported Thursday.

The carnage in Aleppo is merely a foretaste of the slaughter being prepared by Washington against the Syrian city of Raqqa and Iraqi city of Mosul. The bombings, carried out in total disregard for civilian lives, serve notice that Washington and its allies are ready to carry out large-scale war crimes in pursuit of strategic domination over the Middle East.

Planning sessions for the attacks on Raqqa and Mosul were held this week, attended by leaders from the US-dominated North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other governments aligned with Washington's "anti-Islamic State coalition."

In addition to hashing out the details for a massive urban assault against areas inhabited by hundreds of thousands of Syrians and Iraqis, the talks included discussions over a package of new military escalations throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

The stepped-up NATO military operation, to be conducted in the name of the "war against Islamic State," includes deployments to Iraq, Syria, and Libya. The NATO powers also agreed to contribute additional forces for naval operations in the Mediterranean, as part of "Operation Sea Guardian."

With the US military and its proxy forces on both sides of the Syria-Iraq border now in the final countdown for the offensives, it is already clear that the

assaults will be bloody affairs. They are predicted to produce hundreds of thousands of refugees, and the Pentagon is planning for an extended ground occupation, aimed at "controlling the population" and modeled on the lessons of the 2003-2011 US occupation of Iraq, once Islamic State militants are cleared from the area.

The US-led coalition seeks to "collapse ISIS control over Mosul and Raqqa," and is planning for large-scale "stabilization and governance efforts," geared to "hold, rebuild and govern their territory," US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said.

"Mosul is now increasingly coming upon us. We have it in sight," anti-ISIS coalition spokesman Brett McGurk declared Thursday.

Having committed an additional 560 US troops to Iraq last week, bringing the official US troop presence there to nearly 5,000, Washington is pressing for greater troop contributions from its allies. The Australian government announced Tuesday that it will send forces to Baghdad in support of "counter-terror" training programs for Iraqi forces. NATO plans to expand efforts to train Iraqi military officers, in an effort to bolster the imperialist-controlled Iraqi government in Baghdad. The alliance is already training hundreds of Iraqi officers at camps in Jordan, and plans to expand its training programs into Iraq itself.

Secretary Carter made clear Wednesday that Washington expected all of its major allies to get on board with the "war against ISIS." He called for material support from NATO allies, along with commitments of more trainers and advisors.

"We're all going to need to do more," Carter said, following discussions Wednesday morning.

"Today, we made the plans and commitments that

will help us deliver ISIL the lasting defeat that it deserves,” he stated. “We’ve pursued a number of deliberate decisions to accelerate our plan.”

Just prior to Wednesday’s conference, Secretary Carter met with French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, who confirmed that Paris would deploy the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle in support of the US-led aerial bombardment of Iraq and Syria.

On Thursday, Le Drian made clear the global scope of the war preparations being implemented under the banner of the “war on terror” and the “war against ISIS,” which extend from West Africa straight across to Central Asia. He called for stepped-up NATO deployments to sub-Saharan Africa, citing the need for operations focused on the Lake Chad Basin.

“We must also help the poorest countries which are on the front line (near) Lake Chad,” the French Foreign Minister said, highlighting Niger, Chad, and Nigeria for targeting by NATO forces.

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