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Regarding war crimes, Russian and American

United States Vice President Kamala Harris, speaking at a press conference in Romania on Friday, pointed her finger at Russian actions in Ukraine and declared, “We are clear that any intentional attack or targeting of civilians is a war crime. Period.”



An explosion is seen in an apartment building after Russian's army tank fires in Mariupol, Ukraine, Friday, March 11, 2022. (AP Photo/Evgeniy Maloletka)

Harris’ remarks were part of a litany from Washington invoking war crimes charges against Moscow for alleged atrocities in Ukraine. Linda Greenfield-Thomas, US ambassador to the United Nations, accused the Russian government of war crimes, declaring that “attacks on civilians [that] cannot be justified by any—in any way whatsoever.”

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The Russian military is accused of bombing a maternity ward in a hospital in Mariupol, killing 3 people, and wounding up to 17. Photos showing the devastated hospital structure and a bloodied pregnant woman have been published widely.

There should be no objection to the investigation of war crimes charges against Russia, on one condition: that this apply not only to war crimes by opponents of the United States but also to those committed by the United States itself. American presidents and military leaders must be brought to trial for the murder of countless civilians deliberately targeted by US imperialism.

What has been done to Mariupol does not begin to approach the magnitude of the crimes perpetrated by US imperialism around the globe.

Washington has deliberately attacked and targeted innocent civilians the world over. To list the war crimes of the US empire would fill the pages of a lengthy book. Among the chapter headings we would find the names Wounded Knee, Bud Dajo, My Lai, Fallujah, and photo after painfully familiar photo of the corpses of men, women and children surrounded by US soldiers leaning on their rifles.

One could select at random any conflict in which the United States has taken part at any point in the past 30 years and find numerous war crimes for which Washington has been responsible but for which no one has been held accountable.

On February 13, 1991, the US Air Force targeted two smart bombs at an air raid shelter in the Amiriyah suburb of Baghdad. The US military knew that the Amiriyah facility had been used as a civil defense shelter during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s but targeted it anyway, bombing it without any advance warning. About 1,500 civilians, mostly women and children, were killed.

Wikipedia summarizes the findings of former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark, “Neighborhood residents heard screams as people tried to get out of the shelter. They screamed for four minutes. After the second bomb hit, the screaming ceased.”

The account continues: “People staying in the upper level were incinerated by heat, while boiling water from the shelter’s water tank was responsible for the rest of the fatalities.

Not all died immediately; black, incinerated handprints of some victims remain fused to the concrete ceiling of the shelter and can still be seen today.”

No one has been held accountable for this immense war crime.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton tweeted on Thursday, “If Russian leadership would rather not be accused of committing war crimes, they should stop bombing hospitals.” How many hospitals has the United States bombed? Here is a small sample:

- On October 3, 2015, US aircraft bombarded a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz for over an hour, killing at least 22 civilians, including 12 hospital staff and 10 patients. Evidence later revealed that the hospital was deliberately targeted. Then Secretary of State Clinton termed the bombing “deeply regrettable.” Hospital bombings are only war crimes when carried out by Putin.
- In August 2017, the US dropped phosphorus bombs on a hospital in Raqqa in Syria. The WSWS wrote, “Both the targeting of a hospital and the use of phosphorous munitions are war crimes. These chemical weapons, which burn flesh to the bone and reignite inside wounds, are banned under the Geneva Conventions for use in civilian-populated areas.”
- In May 1999, NATO warplanes bombed a major hospital complex in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, destroying the intensive care unit and damaging the maternity unit. At least 3 people were killed, pregnant women were hit with flying glass, and 20 babies were evacuated.

The bloodshed is ongoing. In December 2021, the *New York Times* published the “Civilian Casualty Files,” an investigative report that exposed how US bombings killed thousands of civilians in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, and how the US government covered this up. A single airstrike in July 2016 killed 120 civilians in Northern Syria.

Civilians are deliberately targeted. There is a secret military calculus to every strike, defining the tolerable number of civilian deaths based on the perceived value of the target. The Civilian Casualty Files documented that the US military, through its video monitors, watched children playing on the roof before killing them and reducing their home to rubble.

The media is coldly indifferent, and a stony silence greets each new revelation. There are no meaningful investigations launched; no rapid fire questions from courageous reporters. The American media reserves its unfelt sorrow for the victims of the enemies of Washington.

Targeting Putin for war crimes in Ukraine while covering up the crimes of American empire, the US media dredges up prejudices as old as the medieval Crusades. Well-rehearsed horror greets the deaths of “civilized Europeans,” while Arabs and Asians count for nothing. A piteous outcry is raised for light-skinned refugees from Ukraine, but those refugees of darker skin, fleeing from America’s wars, can drown in the Mediterranean.

Washington declares its profound concern to document Russia’s war crimes, but Julian Assange has been mercilessly persecuted because he exposed the crimes of the United States. For his courageous publication of material detailing such crimes as the murder of Iraqi civilians by US forces, his life has been effectively stripped from him. Washington demands his permanent silencing and will stop at nothing to see him dead.

The hypocrisy extends yet further. The United States, which is calling for charges against Putin, does not acknowledge the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court over its own combatants. No American has been prosecuted by the ICC for war crimes, and the US government has obstructed all attempts to do so.

Washington’s condemnation of war crimes in Ukraine is self-serving, and the moral outrage of the corporate media is manufactured and selective. The hand-wringing over Mariupol has a specific political function. The concern is not to protect the well-being of citizens but to demonize Russians as barbaric and inhuman.

Tendentiously selected and presented by the state and the media, curated for public outrage, war crimes are useful for the fomenting of war. The bombing of a hospital in Mariupol is used to add emotional indignation to the dangerous demands for a NATO-imposed no-fly zone over Ukraine. Such a no-fly zone would inescapably lead to world war.

There is no statute of limitations on war crimes. If Putin is to be sent to the Hague for his crimes, Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump and all their accomplices in the US killings of civilians should join him in the dock.

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