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US war against the people of Syria and Iraq

Patrick Martin

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US air strikes in Iraq and Syria will kill tens of thousands of innocent civilians, and the White House and Pentagon are fully aware of this fact. That is the only conclusion to be drawn from a remarkable public statement Tuesday by a top White House aide.

The statement coincided with the heaviest attacks so far in the air war in Syria and Iraq, with US and allied countries launching 24 strikes, 12 in each country on Tuesday, with British warplanes making their first attacks.

National Security Council press spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden, in an e-mail to Yahoo News, confirmed that the targeting restrictions announced by President Obama for US drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen do not apply to the war launched against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Obama announced those restrictions in a speech to the National Defense University, claiming that the US would only conduct drone strikes against supposed Al Qaeda targets if there was a “near certainty” of no civilian casualties, which he called “the highest standard that we can meet.”

“The specific standards at issue in the NDU speech apply only when we take direct action ‘outside areas of active hostilities,’ as was noted at the time,” Hayden wrote. “That description—outside areas of active hostilities—simply does not fit what we are seeing on the ground in Iraq and Syria right now.”

Hayden was responding to concerns over casualties in the village of Kafr Daryan in Idlib Province, in northwestern Syria, where a Tomahawk cruise missile killed as many as a dozen civilians, including women and young children. The US Central Command confirmed the September 23 strike, saying it targeted the “Khorasan group,” the US-invented label for members of the Al Qaeda affiliated Al Nusra Front, one of the main Syrian “rebel” groups fighting the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The Pentagon’s top spokesman, Rear Admiral John Kirby, confirmed the more permissive standard for air strikes against targets in Syria and Iraq when questioned by reporters Tuesday. “When we say we’re going to go after them, we mean it,” Kirby said.

The restrictions that Obama claimed he was applying to drone missile strikes did not significantly limit the carnage inflicted by 500-pound warheads smashing into the huts of tribal villagers in rural Pakistan and Yemen. Pakistani officials and outside organizations like Amnesty International estimated the civilian death toll from more than 300 drone strikes in these areas as ranging from the high hundreds to many thousands.

After a series of studies on civilian casualties in drone missile strikes were published last year, the WSWS wrote, “The reports, in fact, provide prima facie evidence for a future war crimes tribunal whose defendants would include Obama and top officials at the National Security Council, the Pentagon, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency.” (see: Report documents US slaughter of civilians in drone strikes).

In addition to the direct toll of dead and wounded, there is the effect of such constant attacks on the whole society. An April 2014 article in *Rolling Stone* observed: “The people of Yemen can hear destruction before it arrives. In cities, towns and villages across this country, which hangs off the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula, the air buzzes with the sound of American drones flying overhead. The sound is a constant and terrible reminder ... Over half of Yemen’s 24.8 million citizens—militants and civilians alike—are impacted every day.”

The statements of the White House and Pentagon spokesmen indicate that the death and destruction inflicted on the people of Iraq and Syria will dwarf the horrific impact of drone warfare on Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia. And not a single voice of protest against such mass killing has been raised in official Washington, in either the Democratic or Republican parties.

Representatives of US-backed Syrian groups allied to al-Nusra briefed members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on the Kafr Daryan strike. One Republican congressman who attended the briefing, Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, dismissed concerns about civilian deaths, telling Yahoo News, “Nothing is perfect,” and arguing that any collateral damage from US strikes was “much less than the brutality of the Assad regime.”

The death toll from bombs and missiles is only the beginning. As US officials were at pains to emphasize this week—most prominently Samantha Power, the US ambassador to the United Nations—the main goal of American imperialism in Syria remains that of the overthrow of Assad and his replacement by a US-backed puppet regime in Damascus.

That goal inevitably requires the deployment of tens of thousands of ground troops—whether American, British, French, Turkish, Saudi or some combination—and the military conquest of Syria. The invasion and occupation of Iraq led to a million deaths from 2003 to 2011. A crime of even greater dimensions now looms in both Iraq and Syria.