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## What Is the Real Purpose of the US Bombing in Syria?

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In recent weeks the bombing of Syria has been stepped up. Russia's Aerospace Defense Forces has been wiping out the die-hard militants, carving out four corridors that can be used to evacuate the civilian population, plus one corridor through which the «moderate» opposition can leave together with their weapons, but planes from the US-led coalition are conducting airstrikes over homes and civilian infrastructure in areas nominally under the control of the Islamic State.

Speaking at an Aug. 2 Security Council meeting, the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Evgeny Zagaynov, described the situation in the Middle East, and in Syria in particular, as dismal. He said, *«In just the last few days and weeks dozens of civilians – including women and children – have been killed as a result of US airstrikes in Syria»*.

According to data from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs cited by the Syrian Arab News Agency SANA, 45 civilians died in the town of al-Ghandour as a result of the most recent bombing, and an additional 50 were wounded. On July 19 planes from the American coalition strafed the village of Toukhan al-Kubra, killing 300 and injuring over 100, as of data from July 29. Also destroyed were schools, hospitals, and other civilian infrastructure sites.

US Central Command had previously confirmed the deaths of 14 civilians resulting from US Air Force strikes in Iraq and Syria between July 2015 and April 2016. But clearly they were lowballing those numbers. Just based on the first year of the American-led coalition bombing raids (Sept. 2014 - Sept. 2015), the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights cites statistics on deaths from American air strikes that killed 242 civilians, including children. According to that data, more than 200 civilians were killed during this period.

In one shocking example of the devastation of the civilian population, the Amouri family in Raqqa province lost five little girls on Sept. 2, 2015. They were 8, 7, 6, 5, and 3 years old. The youngest, two-year-old Nariman Amouri, miraculously survived. The girls' uncle, Talha Amouri, who had watched the aircraft streaking toward their house, declared, «America killed us, and it said 'we didn't kill civilians.'» A senior US official who spoke to BuzzFeed while requesting anonymity had this to say about his colleagues at the Pentagon, *«They don't want to admit it. It's against their interest to admit there were civilian casualties in any strikes, and that's why the burden of proof is quite high»*.

The Airwars project, an NGO, released a report in June claiming that over the course of the American air operations in Iraq and Syria, 459 civilians, including 100 children, have been killed during 52 air raids.

Airwars has analyzed 118 air raids, relying on the testimony of eyewitnesses and other reliable sources. Just in early July, 15 civilians died during an air attack on Manbij, as well as 23 people in two hospitals in Idlib that were bombed by American planes.

The coalition's former lead commander, Lt. Gen. John Hesterman, described the current US air campaign over Syria as *«the most precise and disciplined in the history of aerial*

warfare». Airwars project leader Chris Woods challenges that statement: *«The emphasis on precision in our view hasn't been borne out by facts on the ground».*

The most outrageous civilian deaths were reported on Dec. 28 of last year, when 58 people were killed during the bombing of the Syrian city of al-Bab, and on July 17-19 of this year, when 56 people died during the French bombardment of northern Syria. In al-Bab the Western coalition air forces bombed a prison holding inmates who had been scooped up by Daesh. They had been imprisoned for «offenses» such as purchasing cigarettes or violating the Islamic dress code. They had escaped being slaughtered by the jihadists only to fall victim to the bombs and missiles launched by the «anti-terror coalition».

The French air campaign over Syria deserves special mention. French President François Hollande declared that after the attack in Nice, France is stepping up its air strikes over IS-occupied territory. So perhaps we are meant to see the bombing as retaliation for the murder of French citizens in Nice. However, the French prosecutor's office has not yet confirmed any links between Tunisian-born Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, who used his truck to plow over the pedestrians of that spa town, and IS terrorists. But even if the killer embraced IS beliefs, «Général Hollande» might do well to ponder why France – and the West in general – has stirred up such feelings of hatred among Muslims. He might want to think back to five years ago, when French planes bombed Libya with such enthusiasm, destroying the regime of Muammar Gaddafi that had acted as the most reliable barrier to the spread of extremism in the Middle East and North Africa. And it would behoove French leaders to consider the fact that the recent terror attacks in Europe (in France, Belgium, and Germany) – horrific as they were – are also in their own way a logical response to the expanding military presence of the Western powers in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Mali. And the longer they remain there, the more often we will see terror attacks in US and European cities.

Going back to the «precision and discipline» of the American raids over Syria, we must note that unlike Russia's Aerospace Defense Forces, the Americans are not able to refine their air strikes using on-the-ground data, because the US military does not coordinate its actions with the Syrian Arab Army or Syrian intelligence services. As long as Americans continue to draw a parallel between Bashar al-Assad and terrorists, they will have to work without any precise information as to the location of the terrorists vs. the homes of civilians.

And there is yet another aspect to this problem. Perhaps the destruction of schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure sites is actually the real goal of the «anti-terror coalition». Between 2013 and 2014 the author of this article often found himself interacting with the representatives from various incarnations of the Syrian opposition movement. Many of those people later changed their views. They noted that if the US had been truly interested in quickly toppling the government of Bashar al-Assad, they would have introduced a no-fly zone over Syria from the very beginning, as they did in Libya. Then the Free Syrian Army could have made some real headway in 2012-2013. But they chose a different strategy. By supplying weapons to the «rebels», the West added fuel to that fire and prevented either party from gaining a critical advantage. According to this author's informants, this was done so as to completely «pulverize» the Syrian Arab Army and eliminate any potential threat to the United States or its allies in the

region. And now the «anti-terror» strikes are being used to shatter what little is left of the Syrian economy and civilian infrastructure.