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## Syrian rebels massacre at least 126 civilians in suicide bomb blast

By Jordan Shilton

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A convoy of buses evacuating residents from the government-held towns of Foua and Kefraya in Syria's Idlib province was targeted by a suicide bomber Saturday, claiming the lives of at least 126 civilians. The attack occurred west of Aleppo as the buses made their way to government-controlled areas.

The evacuation of the residents of the two towns began Friday morning and was part of a swap deal agreed between the government of Bashar al-Assad and rebel forces. In exchange for allowing the evacuation of residents from Foua and Kefraya, rebels agreed to resettle the populations of Madaya and Zabadani, two towns they control near Damascus. In total, around 7,250 people were evacuated from the four towns. It was part of a broader plan brokered by Iran and Qatar to move up to 30,000 people over a 60-day period.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is linked to the rebels, 68 children were killed in the blast. Other sources have put the figure as high as 80.

The observatory confirmed the blast was caused by an improvised explosive device carried in a vehicle, backing up an earlier report on Syrian state TV which said the attackers used a van meant for delivering aid to gain access to the area.

An al-Jazeera reporter at the scene described how many of the buses were completely destroyed and dead bodies littered the ground. Ambulances rushed those from the scene who had been injured.

Although no group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, it occurred in a rebel-controlled area. Ahrar al-Sham, a conservative Islamist militia, condemned the bombing and called for an international investigation to determine who was to blame.

In stark contrast to the moral outrage expressed by politicians and the media in the wake of the alleged gas attack in Khan Sheikhoun earlier this month, which the Trump administration seized upon to launch an illegal missile strike on a Syrian air base, the death of over 100 Syrians in a suicide bombing—substantially more than the number who died in the alleged gas attack—prompted virtually no condemnation from the Western powers.

The US State Department released a weasel-worded statement which, while condemning the killings, sought to strike a pose of impartiality and refused even to identify the rebel Islamist militias as being responsible. “We deplore any act that sustains or empowers extremists on all sides including today’s attack,” said State Department spokesman Mark Toner.

At a comparable stage in the aftermath of the Khan Sheikhoun incident, just hours after the alleged attack, US government officials had already acted as judge, jury and executioner, and were proclaiming the guilt of the Assad regime without presenting any evidence.

President Donald Trump, who invoked the deaths of “beautiful babies” and the need to defend the “civilized world” in justifying his April 6 cruise missile strike, which killed nine civilians, did not even comment on the bloodbath carried out by forces linked to the American CIA.

For their part, the servile corporate-controlled media reported on the incident, if at all, in a largely routine manner.

The *New York Times* published a lengthy front-page report concentrating almost exclusively on the crimes committed by Assad during the war, alleging that “the largest number of violations by far has been by the Syrian government.” It criticized the failure to bring government officials before the International Criminal Court in the Hague and blamed Russia for blocking any action by the UN Security Council.

The general indifference shown by the political and media establishment to the victims of this brutal massacre exposes once again the hypocrisy of the crusaders for “human rights” in the United States and the European imperialist powers. It demonstrates the fraudulent character of the propaganda campaign in the wake of the alleged gas attack, designed to conceal the real aims of US imperialist intervention in Syria: regime change in Damascus and the consolidation of Washington’s hegemonic position in the energy-rich Middle East against any challenge from its geopolitical rivals.

The reason for the lack of reaction is not hard to find. While it remains unclear precisely which faction of the rebels carried out the mass slaughter, Washington and its Gulf allies have the main

responsibility for arming the collection of right-wing Islamist militias fighting the Assad dictatorship and enabling them to continue the civil war. The opposition is now dominated by the al-Nusra Front, which was formerly affiliated to Al Qaeda.

If any journalist were honest enough to follow the evidence, they would have to apportion a significant part of the blame for the bus convoy bombing to the criminal and reckless policies of US imperialism. More than six years after instigating the Syrian civil war, Washington has the blood of an estimated 500,000 Syrians on its hands.

This does not even take into account the upwards of 1 million people killed as a result of the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003, the hundreds of thousands of deaths due to wars either led or sponsored by Washington in Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia, and the millions throughout the region forced to flee their homes as a consequence of conflict and societal breakdown.

The highly selective concern shown for “human rights” issues by the representatives of US imperialism is nothing new. Saturday’s bombing came less than a month after a single US air strike launched as part of the ruthless onslaught against Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city, claimed the lives of as many as 300 civilians sheltering in a basement. This horrific war crime, coming on top of the thousands of civilian deaths that have occurred since the US-backed offensive was launched last October, was largely buried by the media.

The ruling class considers the deaths of civilians to be collateral damage—a price worth paying in their ruthless struggle to uphold US imperialist interests in the Middle East and around the globe. Barely 24 hours after the bus bombing, Trump’s National Security Adviser General H.R. McMaster vowed in an ABC News interview that Washington was ready to escalate tensions with Russia still further, not only over Syria, but over Europe as well.

McMaster said of Russia’s alliance with Assad, “So Russia’s support for that kind of horrible regime, that is a party to that kind of a conflict, is something that has to be drawn into question as well as Russia’s subversive actions in Europe. And so I think it’s time though, now, to have those tough discussions with Russia.”