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Washington accuses Russia of “crimes against humanity” to justify escalation of Ukraine war

On Saturday, Vice President Kamala Harris formally accused Russia, for the first time, of carrying out “crimes against humanity,” part of an escalating propaganda campaign to condition public opinion for the direct deployment of US-NATO troops into the war over Ukraine.

Speaking at the Munich Security Council, Harris asserted, “Russian forces have pursued a widespread and systemic attack against a civilian population—gruesome acts of murder, torture, rape and deportation. Execution-style killings, beatings and electrocution.”

Harris declared, “In the case of Russia’s actions in Ukraine, we have examined the evidence. We know the legal standards. And there is no doubt these are crimes against humanity.”

Presumably, Harris was referring to the definition of such crimes provided in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Responding to Harris’ remarks, WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North noted on Twitter Sunday, “The crimes specified in the Statute, which Harris invokes against the Russian government, have been committed by every American administration since 1945 (certainly beginning with the firebombing of cities and the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan).”

Indeed, the US government does not recognize the authority of international law over its own officials, but by any objective standard every living American president should be hauled before a war crimes tribunal.

During the Vietnam War, the United States adopted a policy of terrorizing the civilian population through murder and the destruction of property. The US military coined the

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term, attributed to an American general by journalist Peter Arnett, of “destroying the village in order to save it.”

US military officials designated certain areas of Vietnam, where, by policy, all men, women and children were to be systematically exterminated. Any person who was killed in these areas was classified an “enemy combatant,” even if they were an infant. As many as 1 million North Vietnamese civilians were killed during the conflict.



The aftermath of the My Lai massacre, showing mostly women and children dead on a road. This photo taken by the U.S. Army photographer Ronald L. Haeberle on March 16, 1968. [Photo: US Army

In the My Lai massacre, US troops killed between 347 and 504 unarmed civilians. It was, as one of the soldiers accounted, “like a Nazi-type thing: one officer ordered a kid to machine gun everybody down” in a ditch. US soldiers systematically raped women and children, some as young as 10 years old, before mutilating and killing them. None of the perpetrators went to prison.

Following the dissolution of the USSR, the United States engaged in an orgy of global military violence, deliberately targeting not only the civilian population, but even doctors and journalists.

In the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, the American military systematically targeted water treatment plants, power plants and civilian broadcasters. “Every week you ravage Kosovo is another decade we will set your country back by pulverizing you,” declared *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman. “You want 1950? We can do 1950. You want 1398? We can do 1398, too.”

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was preceded by the “shock and awe” bombing of Baghdad, and ultimately led to the deaths of between 275,000 and 306,000 civilians at the hands of US troops or their allies.



In this March 21, 2003 file photo, a government building burns during heavy bombardment of Baghdad, Iraq by US-led forces. [AP Photo/Jerome Delay]

In these wars the United States used torture as an instrument of policy, with US troops photographing themselves beating, raping and killing detained prisoners at the Abu Ghraib dungeon in Iraq. Harris’ invocation of “electrocution” is particularly rich, given the fact that the most famous image of Abu Ghraib depicts a hooded man standing on a box while being electrocuted.



A US soldier threatening an Iraqi prisoner at Abu Ghraib [Photo: Washington Post]

In Afghanistan, on October 3, 2015, under the Obama-Biden administration, the US Air Force carried out a sustained attack on a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital, killing 42 people. MSF called the incident a deliberate breach of international humanitarian law and a war crime.



Elen Costigan with Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) holds a sign as she and others look to the stage in Lafayette Park near the White House in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2015, during an event to mark the delivery to the White House of a petition requesting an independent investigation into the October attack on the Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) trauma hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan. [AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster]

The United States conducts murder as an instrument of state policy, having carried out a total of 14,000 drone strikes over the “war on terror,” the majority of them under the Obama-Biden administration. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, these drone strikes have killed between 10,000 and 20,000 civilians.

Harris also asserted that “Russian authorities have forcibly deported hundreds of thousands of people from Ukraine to Russia, including children,” and that Russia has “cruelly separated children from their families.” But the Biden administration has apprehended, deported or expelled 4 million immigrants. This draconian immigration policy regularly breaks up families in the process.

As with previous American proclamations about human rights abuses by Russia, Harris’ comments were meant to provide cover for the major escalation of the war being waged by Washington on Russia’s doorstep.

After having provided main battle tanks to Ukraine earlier this month, the United States is making active preparations to send F-16 fighters, as well as “civilian contractors” to service them.

Over the past 48 hours, the US media has begun to moot the prospect of deploying ground troops to Ukraine. In an editorial over the weekend, the *Washington Post* called for NATO to deploy “a convincing array of military muscle on the ground.” Chuck Todd, the host of *Meet the Press*, the leading US political talk show, asked, “Will the US and its allies be able to defeat Putin without putting any NATO or US boots on the ground?”

Over the weekend, former National Security Council official Alexander Vindman declared in an interview with the Associated Press that all restraints are being lifted on US intervention in Ukraine. “I feel increasingly confident that [the White House will] provide everything and anything that the Ukrainians need,” he said. “It’s just going to be a matter of time.”

By formally accusing the Russian government of crimes against humanity, the Biden administration is making it clear that Russian leaders face the fate of the leaders of other countries targeted by the US for regime change. In other words, the United States is seeking to block all remaining routes to a diplomatic settlement in order to turn the conflict into a full-scale war between NATO and Russia.

The criminality of the US does not justify the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was a bankrupt and reactionary response to Russia’s encirclement by the US and NATO. But the United States has systematically provoked this war, spending billions of dollars to influence, bribe and subvert the Ukrainian government and turning the country into a virtual colony of the US.

Any examination of the record of US imperialism makes clear that Washington is capable of any crime. In instigating war with a nuclear-armed power, the US is preparing for what will be the greatest of its bloodbaths to date, the consequences will be felt by the working class of the United States as much as that of Ukraine and Russia.

This looming disaster must be stopped. Workers and young people all over the world must mobilize to build a mass movement against the war, based on the perspective of socialism and the international unity of the working class.

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