

Did U.S. Attack Syrian Aid Convoy Just to Blame Putin and Assad?

By [Sott](#)

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The current situation in Syria may look like a confusing mess, but we think there are enough clues to make some sense of it. It all comes down to a statement UN ambassador Churkin made after his close encounter with Samantha “Kill ‘em to save ‘em” Power: “Who is in charge in Washington? Is it the White House or the Pentagon?” The Pentagon and CIA are rabidly anti-Assad; they don’t want a ceasefire. Kerry and the State Department appear – at least on the surface – to want the ceasefire to succeed, despite their continued anti-Assad rhetoric. That doesn’t necessarily mean their aims and objectives are the same as Russia’s when it comes to Syria, but if we give them the benefit of the doubt, at the very least they aren’t completely insane like Ash Carter and the rest of the war hawks. What makes us think that?

Unless Kerry and the rest of the negotiating team are complete idiots, they must have known that a simple repeat of the February ceasefire would not work, for the simple reason that the February ceasefire *did not* work. The lengthy negotiations and the U.S.-requested secrecy of the specific details suggest that the U.S. made major concessions. They could have refused to go forward, blaming Russia for unrealistic demands or some other such nonsense. But they didn’t. And the publicly known goals of the agreement are all agreeable to Syria and Russia and align with their intentions throughout the course of the war for the past year or so: cooperation in the fight against Nusra and Daesh, separation of “moderate” and Nusra elements (i.e., a face-saving way for the U.S. to save some of its Nusra proxies), and humanitarian aid.

These haven’t been U.S. goals in the war, but by agreeing to them, the U.S. can appear to be on the right side of history and morality. What the U.S. really needed was a face-saving way of scaling back their failed strategy without being totally discredited. For the saner factions in Washington, this apparently means scaling back the demands for regime change (Assad’s future was not even mentioned in the agreement), saving some of their proxies (by rebranding some as moderates and hanging others out to dry in joint U.S.-Russian airstrikes), and perhaps leaving open an eventual plan B later down the line in the political process utilizing the remaining “opposition”. Bottom line: the “military” solution isn’t working; the Syrians are steadily winning against all brand of anti-government jihadists. (The real moderates sign truce agreements with the government.)

Before yesterday’s humanitarian aid convoy tragedy (we’ll get to that below), the Syrian government had announced the end of the 7-day ceasefire, as we covered in yesterday’s Snapshot. But they didn’t make any mention of a renewal. In the past week, the Russians and Syrians were the ones to propose both planned ceasefire extensions (on Wednesday, for

another two days, and on Friday, for the final three days). The Syrians obviously held up their end of the bargain, U.S. rhetoric notwithstanding; and the U.S.-backed rebels obviously did not. Kerry and his team must know this, but naturally they feel they cannot publicly admit this.

Then came the U.S. military attack on Syrian forces. Kerry doesn't give airstrike coordinates; this was the Pentagon's treachery. The Russians and Syrians were naturally incensed, and Russia's responses were basically a message to Washington: "This is unacceptable. Either get your house in order, make amends, and get serious, or we're done here." If the ceasefire were just a total joke for all of Washington, that would be all the excuse they needed to call it over and done with and get back to business and usual. But that's not what happened. Instead, *Washington* [offered](#) to extend the ceasefire: "We need to see what the Russians say," Kerry stated when asked if Moscow had responded to Washington's request to extend the ceasefire. "We need to see where we are, and then we'll make a judgment. But we don't have all the facts at this point."

But for the moment at least, it looks like the ceasefire is off. The Russian and Syrian air forces [resumed airstrikes](#) (100+) on jihadist-controlled districts of east Aleppo and in the countryside. Artillery has resumed shelling in southwest Aleppo. Nusra militants [ousted](#) Syrian troops and militia from a northern district of Aleppo city, taking control of 1 km of Castello road. But the Syrians retook the area with Russian [air cover](#), killing 40 militants and [destroying](#) several infantry fighting vehicles and machine-gun-mounted pickup trucks. The army also [destroyed](#) a Nusra unit in the southwest of the city (near the military schools and 1070 apartment quarter), including "four tanks, three infantry combat vehicles, nine pickup truck with heavy machine guns and up to 100 militants." The army is preparing a massive [offensive](#) in northern Hama to recapture all the territory they lost to jihadists earlier in the month.

This might be the Russians' and Syrians' answer to Kerry's offer, at least for now. If so, he had his chance. Neither the rebels nor the Pentagon seem very willing to give up fighting. But since Lavrov has not yet declared the ceasefire dead, that implies that the Russians are still keeping the door open, however unlikely it may be that the U.S. would eat crow and get serious. Kerry for his part says the ceasefire is [not dead yet](#), and the International Syria Support Group has a meeting scheduled for Friday, "on some specific steps" that can be taken.

But if the ceasefire really is dead, the U.S. is left with no other choice than to blame Russia and Syria for the failure. (Not that they care much; they're used to it and wouldn't expect anything else.) And now the Americans have the justification they need: the humanitarian convoy they have been so vocal about finally passed over the Turkish border into Aleppo, only to be almost totally destroyed by what was initially reported to be a series of airstrikes. And you can guess who was immediately blamed: Russia and/or Syria.

Aleppo aid convoy attacked - everyone outraged

The joint UN/Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy had crossed into the Orem area of Aleppo when it came under attack. The [first reports](#) were sketchy, saying it was hit by "airstrikes or mortar fire after offloading aid". SARC spokesman Stephen Ryan told Sputnik: "The situation on the ground is very chaotic at present, and we are still getting details." [RFE/RL](#) quoted "monitors" as saying warplanes attacked the convoy. The one-man British propaganda outfit Syrian Observatory for Human Rights quoted "activists" as saying the attacks were carried

out by “Syrian or Russian” aircraft (how would they be able to tell?). One such activist is [Ammar al-Selmo](#), the Aleppo director of the U.S./UK-funded, Nusra-linked pseudo-humanitarian White Helmets group, who released a video in English last night:

“The place turned into hell, and fighter jets were in the sky,” ... The [White Helmets] group has headquarters less than a mile from where the convoy was hit.

In other words, an al-Qaeda-linked group was less than a mile away when the convoy was hit.

But the UN [insisted](#) it was unclear who carried out the attack, which hit 18 of 31 trucks and a Red Crescent warehouse and left many killed and seriously injured, “including SARC volunteers, as a result of these sickening attacks,” UN relief coordinator Stephen O’Brien said in a [statement](#) today. “A SARC warehouse was also hit and a SARC health clinic was also reportedly severely damaged.” He also called for an “immediate, impartial and independent” probe into the attack.

The IFRC has confirmed that “[around 20](#)” civilians and one SARC staff member were killed as they were unloading the trucks. They also [said](#) they don’t know who is responsible: “We do not know exactly whom that attack came from. It is not possible for us to know so quickly after the event what the source of the attack was or who was directly involved but what we do know whenever the convoy moves all relevant Military authorities are informed after movement together with the exact plan of what is going to happen.”

This is a major setback. UN aid spokesman [Jens Laerke](#) says that the UN had received all the necessary authorizations from the Syrian government (the very thing the U.S. had focused on as their main bone of contention regarding Syria’s “compliance”). Now, the UN is suspending all humanitarian aid work in Aleppo Province for three days in protest of the attack.

Dmitry Peskov said the hope for a renewal of the ceasefire is now “[very weak](#)”, adding: “The conditions are very simple. The shooting needs to stop and the terrorists need to stop attacking Syrian troops. And of course it wouldn’t hurt if our American colleagues didn’t accidentally bomb the Syrians.”

The U.S. expressed its “[outrage](#)” over the attack, immediately blaming Russia and Syria: “The destination of this convoy was known to the Syrian regime and the Russian federation and yet these aid workers were killed in their attempt to provide relief to the Syrian people... The United States will raise this issue directly with Russia. Given the egregious violation of the Cessation of Hostilities we will reassess the future prospects for cooperation with Russia.” Wouldn’t it be more prudent to wait and see what actually happened? Remember, this is coming from the same people who “mistakenly” bombed the Syrian army just three days ago!

After the airstrike, Russian and U.S. officials held urgent meetings. According to an anonymous [U.S. official](#): “We are also going to be meeting with the Russians at high levels to try to get a sense from them about where they think this [Syrian ceasefire] can go from here.” Kerry and Lavrov met in New York today, but didn’t make any statements to the press. Lavrov also scheduled a [meeting](#) with Syrian FM Walid Muallem, and the Russians

met [Chinese](#) diplomats to discuss the situation in Syria. Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov explicitly [denied](#) any Russian or Syrian involvement in the attack (as did the [Syrian military](#)):

“No airstrikes were carried out against a humanitarian aid convoy in a southwestern suburb of Aleppo by Russian or Syrian aviation. Seeing as the convoy’s route lied through the territories controlled by militants, the Russian reconciliation center monitored its passage yesterday via drones.” According to the general, the monitoring finished when all humanitarian aid was delivered at around 10:40 GMT. “Further movements of the convoy were not monitored by the Russian side. Only the militants controlling this area know details of the convoy’s location,” Konashenkov added.

“The [examination](#) of the video footage made via drones of the movement of the humanitarian convoy in areas controlled by militants in the province of Aleppo has revealed new details. The video clearly shows how terrorists are redeploying a pickup with a large-caliber mortar on it.”

The examination of video footage reveals no signs of an ammunition strikes on the convoy, he said. “We have carefully studied videos by so-called activists from the site and found no signs of any ammunition striking the convoy. There are no shell holes, cars’ bodies are not damaged and there are no construction faults from the bust wave. All shown on the footage is a direct consequence of the cargo being set on fire. The fire strangely coincided with a major offensive by militants in Aleppo.” The ministry emphasized that the perpetrator of the fire, as well as his goal may be known by members of the “White Helmets” organization that has connection to al-Nusra Front terrorists who have “accidentally” been at the right time and in the right place with cameras.

This scenario makes the most sense. The Syrians and Russians have no interest and no incentive to attack humanitarian convoys. They also don’t have a history of such egregious errors. (The Pentagon on the other hand, not only had an interest in striking the Syrian Army this weekend, they have a long history of similar “mistakes”.) So who benefits? Again, the Pentagon and the rebels. And it was predictable, too. This is probably why the Syrian government waited so long to provide authorization for the convoys’ passage. They knew the areas were still held by rebels, they knew the rebels had [made statements rejecting the aid](#), and they knew it was possible that the convoys would be attacked and then blamed on the government. On the other hand, they knew they had to allow the convoys through, otherwise it would appear as if they were deliberately depriving Syrians of aid, which feeds into the mainstream “Assad is an evil dictator” propaganda. Either way, they lose.

So, at this point it’s hard to say exactly what happened, but we’ll provide a scenario: the White Helmets and other Nusra-affiliated rebels waited until the aid was delivered, set fire to the convoys, killed some of the aid workers, then released statements to their media contacts in the West about “jets in the sky”. After that, the Western response is totally predictable.

Meanwhile, the Saudi “Syrian” High Negotiating Committee released their [three-phase plan](#) for regime change in Syria: first, a permanent ceasefire; second, Assad must go, followed by a 1.5-year transitional period; third, a temporary government; and only then, elections. These morons are dreaming. Also, members of the National Coalition of Syrian

Revolution and Opposition Forces say they're open to [negotiations](#) with Assad whenever he is. And the international Group of Friends of the Syrian People think they could [replace](#) Russia and the U.S. as truce mediators in Syria. That doesn't seem likely. Where do they find all these people?

New Jersey/New York bombing suspect

New details have emerged about the suspect in the series of explosive devices found in New Jersey and New York over the weekend, who has been [charged](#) with five counts of attempted murder of a law enforcement officer and two gun charges (federal charges still pending). The suspect Ahmad Khan Rahami's wife reportedly [left the U.S.](#) just a few days before the bombs were discovered, and authorities are working with officials in Pakistan and the UAE to get in touch with her. So far Rahami hasn't been cooperating with law enforcement.

It's still unclear if he was working alone. Surveillance video apparently shows him [placing down](#) the duffel bag in Manhattan, after which two men take the pressure cooker out of the bag and leave it on the sidewalk, but whether they were involved or were just checking out the bag is unknown. Commissioner O'Neill doesn't think they were involved. (You can see the video, alleged to be Rahami, [here](#).)

Rahami was not on any terrorist watch lists. Born in Afghanistan, and married to a Pakistani woman, his travels there in 2011 (when he was married), and again to Afghanistan from April 2013 to March 2014 may be benign (he received secondary screening both times upon returning, without any problems).

According to "[Maria](#)", an ex-girlfriend from high school and mother to one of Rahami's children:

"He would speak often of Western culture and how it was different back home," she said. "How there weren't homosexuals in Afghanistan. ... He seemed standoffish to American culture, but I never thought he would cross the line," she added. ... "One time, he was watching TV with my daughter and a woman in a [military] uniform came on and he told [their daughter], 'That's the bad person,'" she said.

...

At Edison High School, where Rahami and Maria met, Rahami got along with classmates and was known as the class clown, she said. But he often criticized American culture, comparing it to the strict Islamic code of his homeland. "I never thought he would do something like this," she said through tears. "I think he was brainwashed."

... Right before their daughter was born, Rahami was in Afghanistan and had trouble returning because authorities in Afghanistan confiscated his passport for unknown reasons, Maria said. The last time Maria knows that Rahami visited his homeland was nine years ago. He brought back a wife and another child, she said.

Maria did not say what prompted their breakup, and cut the interview short saying she did not want to speak to a reporter. But she did say she did not want Rahami around their daughter, whom she did not name. "I didn't want him to see my daughter," she said. "If he loved her, he would have paid child support. My greatest fear is that he would try to take my daughter."

Rahami apparently showed a change in behavior upon returning from one of his trips to Afghanistan, according to the [New York Post](#):

He became noticeably devout after returning from a visit to his homeland two years ago, friends and law enforcement sources said. "He had changed. He dressed differently, more religiously, the robe and everything," Flee Jones, 27, a childhood pal of Rahami, told The Post. "I really never expected it from him. He was always this fun loving guy, but now he was all quiet. He had found religion. It's mind blowing."

He's also posted radical Islamic writings on a personal website, [sources told DNAInfo](#).

The [Telegraph](#) expands: "It's like he was a completely different person," Mr Jones said. "He got serious and completely closed off." Back to the *Post*: He didn't get along with his father, according to his sister, who is shocked and can't believe that her brother did this, according to a law enforcement source. In 2014, Rahami was arrested for assault after attempting to stab his sister, who dropped the charges (he spent over 2 months in jail - before that, he spent a day in jail in 2012 for violating a restraining order). Regulars at his family's restaurant provided more impressions:

Regulars at First American Fried Chicken were shocked by Ahmad Rahami's arrest, describing him as a friendly guy who would sometimes give out free food to cash-strapped customers. He also has fascination with cars — fast ones, several people said. "All this guy ever talks about is his cars," said Ryan McCann, 33. "He loves fixing cars up and making them fast. All I ever heard him talk about was Honda Civics, Honda Accords, maybe an Acura. He would soup them up."

A construction worker who lives next to the fried chicken restaurant described the Rahami family as being fiercely private. "They didn't really talk to anybody," said Miguel, 41, who declined to give his last name. He said Ahmad Rahami and a couple of other restaurant workers stopped talking to him entirely when his Israeli heritage came up during a conversation three years ago. "The first thing I did after I talked to them is I went to check my car underneath...I went to check for a bomb," he said.

Former marine Johnathan Wagner, 26, said Mohammad Rahami once showed him a photo from his days as a mujahideen fighter in Afghanistan in the 90s. "He fought off the Russians," Wagner said. "Ahmad as a person never talked about anything personal," he added. "He would ask, 'How is your family doing? Do you need some money?' He seemed normal."

Shades of Orlando nightclub shooter, Omar Mateen...

There's more to the 2014 arrest story, though. According to the [New York Times](#), his father Mohammed says that after the stabbing incident (in this version, it was the brother he stabbed, not the sister) he told FBI agents that he was concerned his son might be involved in terrorism: "But they check almost two months, they say, 'He's O.K., he's clean, he's not a terrorist.' I say O.K." But FBI officials say Mohammed made the comment out of anger and later recanted.

They also report that when Rahami was captured, the authorities found a notebook "pierced with a bullet hold and covered in blood" (presumably that suggests it was on his person, but

no explicit indication is given as to where it was found or in what circumstances), in which were expressed “opinions sympathetic to jihadist causes, according to a law enforcement official who agreed to speak about the investigation only on the condition of anonymity.”

In one section of the book, Mr. Rahami wrote of “killing the kuffar,” or unbelievers, the official said. Mr. Rahami also praised Anwar al-Awlaki, Al Qaeda’s leading propagandist, who died in a drone strike in Yemen, as well as the soldier in the Fort Hood shooting, one of the deadliest “lone wolf” attacks inspired by Al Qaeda.

Rahami may not have been on any watch list that we know of, but his “closeness” to the FBI should give cause for concern, given their history of radicalizing young Muslims and manipulating them into carrying out terror attacks. Apparently, similar material was [found](#) on the unexploded pressure cooker bomb found in New York: “A handwritten note ... contained ramblings, including references to previous terrorists including the Boston bombers, an unnamed law enforcement official told CNN.” Until these materials are produced, or the sources named, take them with a grain of salt.

As for the Minnesota stabber, Adan, the reason he was at the mall was to pick up a new iPhone he had preordered. He was happy when leaving the apartment he shared with his father, before driving the half-mile to the mall. It appears as if he just “snapped”:

“While he was at the mall, the family doesn’t know what happened. But what they know is, between the time he left his home and they knew what he was going to do and going to the mall, in between they don’t know what happened,” Yussuf said. Employees at the T-Mobile store in the mall declined to comment and referred WCCO to national T-Mobile media representatives.

...

The security firm Securitas issued a statement that Adan had resigned in June of 2016 from his part-time security job with them and that he had been assigned to the St. Cloud company Electrolux Home Products. The family says he was currently working as a security guard at Capital One in downtown St. Cloud and that he was enrolled as a student at St. Cloud State. But St. Cloud State said he had been enrolled between 2014 and the spring of 2016 and was no longer enrolled there. Late Monday, Capital One said that after a review of company records, Adan had never worked there.

...

Mayor Dave Kleis has seen the security footage that he says shows Adan’s final moments. “He had identified himself as a police officer, he made a command, the suspect went down and then immediately came forward, lunged at him with a knife,” Kleis said. “There must have been more than 20 feet but he covered it in a matter of a second and then the officer fired.” The mayor says the video shows Adan getting him up three times and the officer continuing to fire.

And while we have heard numerous victims say Adan was shouting “God is great” in Arabic and demanding to know if shoppers were Muslim or not, the family told Yussuf he was not particularly religious and that they did not know of any ties he had to ISIS or radical groups.

According to Yussuf the family is going over the security video with authorities to try and determine what happened inside the mall right before the stabbing started.

Newsbites

The Czech Ambassador in Damascus, Eva Filipi, says there was [no Syrian revolution](#) in 2012: “what is going on in Syria is a proxy regional and international war”. Thankfully a few politicians out there have a clue (and are willing to publicly admit it)! Virginia State Senator Richard Black is another. After the U.S. attack on the Syrian Army, he wrote to Syrian ambassador Jaafari that he joins the Syrian people in mourning the loss of their soldiers and expresses his hope that the U.S. was not coordinating directly with Daesh (he’s smart enough to know that’s a very real possibility). You can read his letter [here](#).

The Iranian and Cuban presidents met with each other [in Havana](#) on Monday to discuss cooperative relations between their countries. President Rouhani described the shared struggle and survival of the two nations during outrageous US pressures: “Iran and Cuba are the symbol of resistance to the most severe sanctions.” Rouhani also emphasized the need for Cuba-Iran relations in all areas. As US influence wanes, the world is seeing a turning point as countries who suffered unjust Western sanctions join together.

The U.S. has set up a [coordination center](#) in Tell Abyad, Syria, in preparation for the NDF mission to take Daesh’s de facto capital, Raqqa. Around 50 U.S. soldiers arrived in 15 armored cars. No news as of yet whether these are the same rejects who ran out of al-Rai with their tails between their legs after U.S.-backed rebels told them how much they were appreciated.

In Iraq, the US is sending [more troops](#) to the Iraqi air base of Qayara, in a reported move to support a planned joint offensive in Mosul with Iraqi forces. President Obama and the Iraqi semi-puppet PM Abadi [discussed](#) their ‘anti-Daesh campaign’ and the start of new operations. In recent months the U.S. has surprised the world by doing some actual fighting against Daesh in Iraq. Perhaps the U.S. is too afraid of Russia helping Iraq, and so it had to clean up just a little of its own mess. Regardless, the offensive against Shirqat, south of Mosul, has begun

On the Saudi front, U.S. Senator Christopher Murphy said that Saudi Arabia has [ignored repeated US requests](#) not to bomb targets that caused major civilian casualties in its airstrikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen. Murphy noted that ordinary Yemenis blamed the United States for not restraining the Saudis and their coalition allies, and warned that this attitude was helping extreme Islamist groups win popularity in Yemen. That’s the plan, of course, and has been for decades.

Saudi Airlines jet SVA 872 with 300 passengers aboard was directed to an isolation area upon landing in Manila, Philippines. The crew said the [hijack alert button](#) had been activated accidentally, but officials took precautions anyway, as they say it had been pushed twice.

Despite public outcry about Bahrain’s human rights abuses, Prince Charles is [joining a tour](#) to “strengthen the United Kingdom’s warm bilateral relations” with the country, which basically amounts to increasing arms trading. Talk about sick!

A prominent anti-Kiev activist from Ukraine, Yevhen Zhylin, was reportedly [shot dead](#) in a restaurant near Moscow. The gunman was described as wearing a fake moustache and a panama hat. Yes, really. The Ukrainian spy professionals are apparently watching too many James Bond movies.

The deadly Japanese doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyo has been [banned in Russia](#) by the Supreme Court and deemed a terrorist organization. The sect gained notoriety in 1995 for their mass killings using chemical attacks in the Tokyo subway. The Investigative Committee of Russia opened a criminal case against the group in April and conducted raids along with the FSB to find members and confiscate its literature and electronic data.

In the U.S., more athletes are following Colin Kaepernick's lead by [kneeling during the national anthem](#). Miami Dolphins players Arian Foster, Kenny Stills and Michael Thomas joined the protest during their Sunday game. Just days before, a local police union lashed out against the football players' right to protest and their freedom of speech. Jeff Bell, president of the Broward County Sheriff's Office Deputies Association, said, "in certain jobs you give up that right of your freedom of speech (temporarily) while you serve that job or while you play in an NFL game." Bell not only displays an absence of comprehension of the massive injustices committed against black communities but also seeks to further it by removing these players' freedom of speech.

[George H.W. Bush to vote for Killary](#)

'Nuff said.

[U.S. Air Force names new B-21 stealth bomber "Raider" as tribute to WWII Japan raids](#)

A facepalm moment. What better way to commemorate the indiscriminate firebombing of Japanese cities that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people?

[Analysts say Killary's sickness is causing the peso to lose value](#)

Yes, it may sound odd, but if Killary ever becomes president, expect an overall decline in just about everything, including happiness, puppies, and the number of people living on this planet.

And finally, Trump's latest gaffe (more tweets [here](#)):

If I had a **bowl of skittles** and
I told you just **three would kill you.**
Would you take a handful?

That's our **Syrian refugee problem.**



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