

Washington's Hypocrisy over Russian Arms in Syria

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Western denunciations of Russia for sending back refurbished helicopters to Syria recall nothing so much as the old adage, “Do as I say, not as I do.”

Earlier this month, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton launched a propaganda barrage aimed at intimidating Russia, claiming that Moscow was sending advanced Russian attack helicopters to Syria for use against the country’s civilian population. Breathlessly announcing that, according to “the latest information” available to the US government, the helicopters were on their way, Clinton condemned Moscow for behavior that “will escalate the conflict quite dramatically.”

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland rhetorically demanded: “How can the Russians conscience [sic] their continued military sales to Syria?”

Washington’s ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, while acknowledging that arms sales to Syria were not “technically obviously a violation of international law [sic]”—the United Nations has approved no arms embargo against the country—asserted that Russia’s actions were nonetheless “reprehensible.”

Washington was forced to back off at least partially from this line of attack when Russia explained that the only helicopters being sent to Syria were nine aircraft purchased from the former Soviet Union in the 1980s that had been sent back to Russia some time ago for repairs and were now being returned. The bulk of these helicopters are designed for transport, and reassembling them once they reach Syria will take months.

Clinton’s claim that the return of the aging helicopters was serving to “escalate the conflict quite dramatically” was quite simply a lie.

What has radically intensified the civil war in Syria is the massive flow of arms across the Turkish border to Syria’s so-called rebels, who are backed by Washington and its allies. A series of reports in the US press, citing high level American officials, have made it clear that CIA personnel are on the ground in Turkey—and almost certainly in Syria itself—directing this operation. Meanwhile, the Obama administration maintains the fiction that it is not sending arms into Syria based on the fact that the money for the weapons is being provided by its client states in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

As for the charge of sending advanced helicopter gunships into the region to be used in a state crackdown against a popular revolt, Obama, Clinton and company have no need to look so far afield as Russia to find a culprit.

On Wednesday, the Turkish military announced that it had sent US-supplied warplanes and

attack helicopters into Iraq to strike purported camps of the Kurdish nationalist group, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party). It was only the latest in a series of bloody cross-border raids. What was the response of the State Department's human rights brigade? Silence and approval.

Washington has provided unconditional support to the Turkish government in its anti-Kurdish operations in a conflict that has claimed some 40,000 lives over the past 28 years. It has branded the PKK, which has a mass base of support among an oppressed and largely impoverished Kurdish population, a "foreign terrorist organization," thereby giving a green light for the murder of its members and supporters.

While the US government brands Kurds taking up arms against the Turkish government as "terrorists," it provides covert support for the PJAK, a similar armed Kurdish group operating against Iran. At the same time, CIA operatives are working energetically to convince the Kurds in Syria to take up arms against the Assad government.

Such machinations have a long and tragic history, in which the US, the former dictatorship of the Shah in Iran and Israel have sought to manipulate the Kurdish question to further counterrevolutionary aims in the region. Which armed Kurdish groups Washington condemns as terrorists and which ones it embraces as "freedom fighters" is entirely dependent upon US imperialist interests.

Last December, the Turkish military's campaign against the Kurdish rebels produced a brutal massacre when an F-16, produced by the US arms manufacturer Lockheed-Martin, guided by a US-supplied surveillance drone, carried out an air strike on the Turkish-Iraqi border. The target, described as "suspected militants," turned out to be a large group of Kurdish youth bringing cheap fuel across from Iraq.

Thirty-five youth, most of them teenagers and the youngest just 12 years old, were slaughtered in the strike. The Turkish press reported that families had difficulty separating the remains of their sons from those of the pack mules used to transport the fuel. "We pieced them together the best we could and buried them," said Abdurrahman Yurek, whose 16-year-old son was one of the victims.

When tens of thousands of Kurds defied a government ban on celebrating the Kurdish New Year (Nowruz) last March, security forces used tear gas, water cannons, armored personnel carriers and helicopters, again supplied by the US, to repress the gatherings, resulting in hundreds of arrests.

On the very eve of these mass demonstrations, Bell Helicopter, based in Fort Worth, Texas, announced its sale of 15 aircraft to the Turkish security forces for use in "surveillance and air support for ground operations."

And late last year, the Obama administration agreed to transfer three AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopters, armed with Gatling cannons and multiple rockets and missiles, to the Turkish military for use against the Kurdish rebels. Just last month, at the NATO summit in Chicago, President Barack Obama told his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gül that he would work to win congressional approval for selling Turkey MQ-9 armed Reaper and MQ-1 Predator drones, the pilotless warplanes that the US has used to kill thousands of people in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere.

Needless to say, no one in Washington expressed any concern that these advanced weapons systems would serve to “escalate the conflict quite dramatically” in Turkey.

The arms sales to Turkey are only a small fraction of the vast stock of weapons that the US is pouring into the region. This fiscal year, total US foreign arms sales are expected to top \$60 billion, nearly five times the amount sold by Russia to foreign clients last year. Nearly half of the fiscal 2012 US total is accounted for by the sale of advanced warplanes to the monarchical regime that rules Saudi Arabia. Among other top US customers are similar regimes in Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain, where Washington announced last month that it was brushing aside concerns over murderous repression against the country’s Shia majority in order to resume arms shipments.

All of these regimes are being armed to the teeth in preparation for a US confrontation with Iran, the country that Washington sees as the principal regional obstacle to the imposition of American hegemony over the oil-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. The CIA’s fomenting of a sectarian civil war and preparations for direct military intervention to bring about regime-change in Syria, together with the phony human rights campaign and hypocritical denunciations of Russian arms sales, are all directed at achieving this strategic objective at the expense of the peoples of these regions.

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