

Washington seizes on alleged massacre in Syria to promote war

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Reports of scores of deaths in the Syrian village of Tremseh Thursday, in the course of violent clashes between government forces and opposition militia, have been seized upon by the United States and its allies to ramp up their campaign to overthrow the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

In a press statement issued Friday, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asserted that the Syrian regime had carried out “yet another massacre,” claiming there was “indisputable evidence that the regime deliberately murdered innocent civilians.”

However, no sooner had the US-sanctioned account of events been released than it fell apart. Syrian opposition spokesmen had initially claimed that pro-Assad militiamen had entered the village and killed unarmed civilians. They then claimed that the Syrian army had carried out a rampage aimed at civilians. But it quickly became clear that almost all of the deaths were the result of fighting between government troops and foreign-armed anti-Assad militia.

Though there are still conflicting accounts of the events in Tremseh, it appears that “rebel” fighters attacked an army convoy passing through the village on Thursday. Government troops then launched a sustained counterattack, resulting in opposition forces being routed and suffering heavy casualties.

Major General Robert Mood, the Norwegian commander of the United Nations mission in Syria, told a press conference in Damascus that observers under his command had witnessed prolonged fighting in the area, including the use of army mechanized units and helicopters.

The UK-based pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that “several dozen rebel fighters were among those killed” in the battle in and around Tremseh. Reuters reported that the fighting was

part of a campaign by the Syrian air force over recent days directed against opposition activities near Hama.

“At this stage, though we do not yet have the final count, the number of civilians killed by shelling is not more than seven,” said a spokesman from the pro-opposition Sham News Network. “The rest were members of the [US-backed] Free Syrian Army,” he added.

Tremseh is located near the central Syrian city of Hama, an area that has been a focal point of fighting between the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and government forces for over a year.

The FSA is the main armed “rebel” group in Syria. Backed by Washington, the FSA leadership is based in Turkey, where it receives direction and aid from the US Central Intelligence Agency. The FSA is largely made up of former Syrian army personnel and has close ties to Sunni Islamist militias. It receives money and weapons from the Western-backed dictatorships of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Syria’s state news agency, SANA, reported that the armed forces had moved into the area around Tremseh after locals had complained of “criminals” taking over the village. The agency reported that the army had found the bodies of several civilians who had been executed by opposition “terrorists.”

US allegations of a massacre in Tremseh come as Washington ramps up its diplomatic campaign against Syria, which is aimed at deposing the Assad government by military means in order to install a more pliant Western-backed regime in Damascus.

In particular, the Obama administration is attempting to pressure Moscow and Beijing into acceding to the US campaign for regime-change. The United Nations Security Council is due to vote July 18 on a resolution sponsored by the British government that could, under

Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, authorize the use of military force to oust the Syrian government.

During a tour of Asia, Secretary Clinton used the alleged massacre to condemn the Russian and Chinese governments for refusing to endorse the US-led campaign against Assad. “History will judge this [United Nations Security] Council,” Clinton said in her statement. “Its members must ask themselves whether continuing to allow the Assad regime to commit unspeakable violence against its own people is the legacy they want to leave.”

Russia has proposed an alternate draft Security Council resolution that opposes sanctions and calls for support for the current UN mission to Syria. The Russian foreign ministry came close to accusing Washington and its local proxies in Syria of orchestrating the violence in Tremseh, noting that the US accusations of a massacre coincided with the start of the UN talks on Syria.

“Without prejudicing the outcome of the investigation,” Russian government spokesman Aleksandr Lukashevich stated Friday, “we have no doubt that this atrocity is of advantage to the forces that do not seek peace, but persist in trying to sow the seeds of sectarian animosity and civil conflict.”

The alleged massacre in Tremseh is the latest example of the Obama administration’s cynical use of “humanitarian” justifications for its increasingly bloody intervention into the Syrian conflict. Following a well-established pattern, the US media swung into line on Thursday, promulgating uncritically the administration line on the events in Tremseh and largely ignoring the evidence contradicting the official pro-war propaganda.

In May, Washington similarly seized on accusations of a massacre of 100 people in the village of Houla. At that time, Clinton used the killings to undermine the ceasefire plan being negotiated with the Assad regime by UN envoy Kofi Annan. Following the Houla “massacre” the US-backed FSA repudiated the Annan plan on the grounds that the Syrian government had used the ceasefire to carry out the attack.

As subsequently revealed by the leading German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, but almost completely ignored by the rest of the Western media, multiple eyewitness accounts of the killings in Houla reported that the massacre was actually carried out by

FSA fighters who had targeted minority Shiites, Alawites and Christians who had refused to join the Sunni-based opposition.

The Syrian National Council, the Turkish-based opposition group that is closely linked to the FSA, on Thursday echoed the line coming from Washington on the alleged massacre and urged the UN to pass a binding resolution against the Assad government. Meanwhile, the French government of President Francois Hollande used the claims of a massacre in Tremseh to announce that it would begin supplying the Syrian opposition with military-grade communications equipment.



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