

U.S. Blames Russia for Deadly Airstrike on U.N. Aid Convoy

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A vest of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent hanging on a damaged vehicle, in Aleppo, Syria, Sept. 20, 2016.
Aleppo 24 news via AP

The United States has accused Russia of attacking a U.N. aid convoy in Syria in a fatal air strike on Monday night.

Two U.S. officials claim that a pair of Russian Sukhoi SU-24 fighters was seen in the skies above the aid convoy at the time of the strike, the Reuters news agency reported.

The Syrian Red Crescent said the head of one of its local offices and “around 20 civilians” had been killed in the attack, although estimates from other war monitors have reported the number of deaths at 12. The United States said that it held Russia responsible for the deaths.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that the strike “lowered the bar of depravity,” while U.N. aid chief Stephen O’Brien said that, if deliberate, the strike amounted to a war crime.

The convoy was clearly marked as humanitarian and notification of its route had been passed on to all parties, O'Brien said.

Russia has denied any responsibility, blaming the deaths on a cargo fire. A Russian Defense Ministry spokesperson claimed that the footage of destroyed vehicles offered no evidence that munitions had struck the convoy.

"There are no craters and the exterior of the vehicles do not have the kind of damage consistent with blasts caused by bombs dropped from the air," he said, adding that the incident happened during a "massive rebel offensive around Aleppo".

Russia's Foreign Ministry also suggested that the allegations of Russian involvement were a way for the United States to deflect criticism from an airstrike carried out at the weekend, which killed dozens of Syrian government troops.

The United States has since apologized for the strike, claiming that it had intended to target terrorist fighters.

The incidents indicate the collapse of a ceasefire agreement brokered this month by the United States and Russia. The two parties, both aiming to combat terrorists fighting in Syria, have repeatedly failed to agree on which targets within the country should be classed as "terrorist."

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry however, said on Tuesday that the ceasefire was "not dead."

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