

# *Moscow says U.S. openly sides with terrorists in Syria*

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Moscow, September 28 (RHC)-- By blacklisting a shipping company and five vessels for supplying the Russian military battling terrorists in Syria with fuel, the U.S. has come out as a sponsor of militants there, the Russian Foreign Ministry has said.

Three Russian individuals, five vessels and a shipping company were sanctioned by Washington for their alleged role in “a sanctions evasion scheme to facilitate the delivery of jet fuel to Russian forces operating in Syria,” the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) reported.

Maritime Assistance LLC was designated for serving as “a front” for another shipping firm, Sovfracht, blacklisted by the U.S. back in September 2016 over its operations in Crimea, after the peninsula reunited with Russia. The three Russians are senior Sovracht executives, who were allegedly in charge of Maritime Assistance LLC’s operations.

Moscow has minced no words in responding to the move, saying that by punishing people and entities who make it possible for Russian warplanes to destroy militant positions, the U.S. effectively admitted it is in league with terrorists. “The masks are off.”

“The U.S. exposed itself as a terrorism enabler,” the ministry said, adding that the fight against terrorists on the ground will go on “despite the fact that that the US patronizes them and illegally occupies part of

this sovereign country's territory," thus delaying the end of the Syrian bloodshed.

The ministry noted that while the US used the situation in Crimea as a pretext to sanction Sovfracht, it did not bother to cover its true intentions now. The masks have fallen – this is directly about seeking to prevent the complete eradication of terrorists on the Syrian soil.

A day after slapping Russia with the Syria-related sanctions, the U.S. accused Damascus of conducting a chlorine attack near the village of Kabana in Latakia province on May 19. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Friday that the U.S. intelligence "has concluded" that chemical weapons – specifically, chlorine – was used in the reported attack on militants. U.S. envoy for Syria Jim Jeffrey further claimed that four people had been injured as result of the incident. Neither Pompeo nor Jeffrey provided any evidence for their claims.

While declining to say how the U.S. intended to respond to the 'revelations,' Jeffrey invoked the U.S. airstrikes against Syria in April 2017 and April 2018 as examples of what such allegations could entail.

In addition to raining down bombs on Syria without any proof of Damascus's role in the "chemical incidents" in Khan Shaykhun and Douma, the U.S. retains a military presence in Syria of about 400 soldiers, despite President Donald Trump's orders for complete withdrawal last December and in violation of international law.

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