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## EU ADDS ITS VOICE CONDEMNING ATTACK ON SYRIA HUMANITARIAN CONVOY

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The EU has added its voice to the international row over the deadly attack on a humanitarian convoy near Aleppo on Monday (19 September), but □ unlike the USA □ it did not point its finger at Russia.

The United States believes two Russian aircraft attacked an aid convoy near Aleppo in a strike that shattered a one-week truce, US officials said yesterday (20 September). Russia denied involvement. And the EU issued a statement calling on all parties to refrain from attacks and stick to the ceasefire.

The incident, in which 18 trucks from a 31-vehicle convoy were destroyed, looked likely to deal a death blow to diplomatic efforts to halt a civil war now in its sixth year.

Two Russian Sukhoi SU-24 warplanes were in the skies above the aid convoy at the exact time it was struck late on Monday, two US officials told Reuters, citing US intelligence that led them to conclude Russia was to blame.

Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman denied the assertion, telling reporters at the United Nations the US administration has no facts to support the claim, adding: We have nothing to do with this situation.

Ben Rhodes, a deputy US national security adviser, said the White House held Russia responsible for what he called an enormous humanitarian tragedy but he did not address whether the attack was carried out by Russian aircraft.

Earlier Russia, which denied its aircraft or those of its Syrian government allies were involved, had said it believed the convoy was not struck from the air at all but had caught fire because of some incident on the ground.

The Syrian Red Crescent said the head of one of its local offices and around 20 civilians had been killed, although other death tolls differed. The attack prompted the United Nations to suspend all aid shipments into Syria.

EU condemns unacceptable precedent

EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini and Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Christos Stylianides issued yesterday (20 September) a statement, calling the air strikes against the aid

convoy alarming violations of international humanitarian law.

This attack risks setting an unacceptable precedent, jeopardising the safe delivery of humanitarian aid everywhere, they stated.

We call on all parties to the conflict to refrain from any new attack and respect fully the cessation of hostilities. We call in particular on the Syrian government to cease its air campaign against non-terrorist targets in Aleppo, and to allow the immediate and unhindered resumption of humanitarian access to all besieged areas and in particular to the people of Aleppo, Mogherini and Stylianides further said.

Unlike the US, the EU apparently is not equipped with intelligence allowing it to assign blame to Russia.

In the State of the Union speech he delivered on 14 September, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proposed new powers for the EU foreign affairs chief, and the start of a real defence effort, compatible with NATO.

He made reference to the brutal fight over Syria, asking: But where is the Union, where are its member states, in negotiations towards a settlement? Indeed, the Syria talks are under the auspices of the UN, co-chaired by Russia and the United States.

The UN Security Council is due to hold a high-level meeting on Syria today.

Juncker: Soft power is not enough for the EU

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Diplomatic gamble

The ceasefire deal was a gamble on unprecedented cooperation between the United States and Russia, despite trust between the two Cold War-era foes being at its lowest point for decades.

They support opposite sides in the war between Assads government and insurgents but are both fighting against Islamic State militants. The deal calls for Washington and Moscow to share targeting information eventually.

Following Mondays attack, there were reports of intensified clashes across Syria.

US confused over Russias real intentions in Syria

Russias latest military moves in Syria have sharpened divisions within the US administration over whether Russian President Vladimir Putin genuinely backs a UN-led initiative to end the civil war or is using the negotiations to mask renewed military support for Syrian President Bashar Assad.

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The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor of the war, said clashes took place between the army and rebels in the Jobar district of Damascus and areas northeast of the capital, after the army tried to advance.

Near the central city of Homs, the army shelled one village, while helicopters and warplanes bombed several other places, including the rebel-held town of Rastan, it said.

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Kaynak/Source: