

# Boots on the Ground: What Are the Real Objectives of U.S. Special Forces in Syria?

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*There is a real danger that US Special Forces deployed in Syria and embedded with the new Arab-Kurdish force will coordinate the tactics and strategy of the terrorists (also known as “moderate rebels”) on the ground, US geopolitical analyst Eric Draitser told Sputnik.*

The US war planners have decided that they need “boots on the ground” in Syria aimed at creating a quagmire for Russia in much the same way it did for the USSR in Afghanistan in the 1980s, geopolitical analyst and StopImperialism.org editor **Eric Draitser** underscores.

“It is becoming increasingly likely that the US has decided that it needs to have “boots on the ground” in Syria, if not for any other reason than to counter Russian assertiveness, and to try to create a quagmire for Russia as it did for the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. There is a real danger that US Special Forces and/or other covert teams will be embedded with the new Arab-Kurd force being constructed by Washington, and that it is these teams who will coordinate the tactics and strategy of the terrorists on the ground in Syria. We’ve seen such a strategy play out in Libya, as well as in Afghanistan, there’s no reason to believe the US wouldn’t do the same in Syria,” Draitser told Sputnik.

Indeed, according to US journalists Greg Jaffe and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, President Obama will send at least 50 Special Operations advisers to Syria in order to cooperate with “resistance forces battling Islamic State in northern Syria.” In their recent piece for Washington Post the journalists elaborated that the troops are due to arrive in Syria over the next month. The contingent’s primary goal will be “advising Syrian Arab and Kurdish forces” which are now fighting within 30 miles of Raqqa, ISIL’s de facto capital, Jaffe and Gibbons-Neff noted citing a US senior defense official.

According to Draitser, the upcoming “Raqqa offensive” is actually the façade behind which Washington will hide its covert activities in support of terrorist groups falsely labeled as “moderate rebels.”

“The US knows perfectly that it cannot openly arm terrorists, so it must do so under the guise of a counter-terrorism operation such as this. We’ve seen this program of arming terrorists begin in earnest, as with the reports of the 50 tons of ammunition and weapons airdropped by the US into the Hasakah region, ostensibly destined for ‘moderate rebels’ though everyone acknowledges the impossibility of knowing exactly who got the weapons and ammunition,” the geopolitical analyst stressed.

Draitser called attention to the fact that even Western media, as well as Arab anti-Assad

outlets, have reported that “so-called moderate rebels” have either surrendered to the infamous al-Qaeda branch al-Nusra Front and ISIL, or simply defected to extremists bringing their weapons with them.

“It is now a documented fact that this happens in many, if not most, cases. Knowing this, as the US unquestionably does, one could make a very good case that the US is knowingly indirectly (if not directly) arming Islamic State and al-Qaeda,” Draitser underscored.

It goes without saying that the US strategy in Syria has been tremendously complicated by Russia’s anti-terror operation, Eric Draitser noted, adding, however, that one should be careful in assuming that the US’ actions are solely in response to Russia’s involvement.

“Perhaps a more precise analysis would note that Washington has pursued the ultimate goal of regime change in Syria consistently since 2011, as has been demonstrated by all the actions and rhetoric from the Obama administration since that time. Today, the US is still pursuing that same goal, though through different means — the US is partnering with various terror groups on the ground, and with its regional allies (especially Turkey) to try to “create facts on the ground” so as to force the Syrian government into a weaker position,” the analyst told Sputnik.

He elaborated that Washington’s strategic approach to the Syrian problem was summoned in the Brookings Institution’s report “Deconstructing Syria: A new strategy for America’s most hopeless war” published in June 2015.

“This is perhaps best illustrated by the combined analysis of the US operation involving a combined Arab-Kurdish force with the ‘Deconstructing Syria’ model as outlined by Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution in late June 2015,” the geopolitical analyst noted.

According to Draitser, Washington’s primary objectives in Syria include: injection of an effective fighting force, the dismemberment of Syria using ‘safe zones,’ ‘buffer zones,’ and ‘humanitarian corridors,’ and the ultimate balkanization of the country.

“This is de facto partitioning of Syria along ethnic/sectarian lines, a model long since proposed by US strategic planners in Iraq and elsewhere in the Arab world. It is a hallmark of imperial, neocolonial tactics, and is the cornerstone of the new strategy for Syria,” the analyst explained.

“The quick and clean regime change model has failed in Syria because of the resolve of the Syrian government and the international support of its allies. However, that simply means that US plans for regime change have to be altered, not scrapped entirely,” Draitser stressed.

However, the analyst expressed doubts regarding the ability of an Arab-Kurdish force to expel Islamic State from Raqqa. In early October, Western media sources cited the Pentagon’s purported plan to launch an offensive, involving some 3,000 Arab warriors and 20,000 Kurdish combatants, aimed at seizing ISIL’s “capital.”

“It should be noted that the idea that a small force of a few thousand Arabs and significant number of Kurds taking control of Raqqa from Islamic State is patently absurd. First and foremost, the Kurds have demonstrated a ferocity

and dedication in the fight when defending and/or retaking Kurdish land occupied by Islamic State. They have shown little to no interest in expending material, treasure, and lives fighting terrorists for control of non-Kurdish land. This is simply a fact of the battlefield that any real expert on the situation knows is simply inescapable. Therefore, such a force would prove entirely incapable of taking Raqqa,”

Draitser elaborated in his interview to Sputnik.

At the same time by backing and supporting Kurds, Washington risks enflaming outrage in Ankara.

“The fact that US air power and military might is being deployed in backing the Kurdish forces is undoubtedly a major source of irritation for the Turkish government, especially as it is a NATO member and arguably the most vocal, most active participant in the international war against Syria,” the analyst remarked adding, however, that it would be naïve to believe that “Turkish annoyance will translate into significant political or geopolitical change.”

On the other hand, the Arab-Kurdish operation would be useful in providing cover for a “more covert US military/intelligence campaign on the ground in Syria,” he emphasized.

Such an escalation on the ground would undoubtedly raise the stakes for all players in Syria, Draitser stressed.

So, is there any threat of direct confrontation between the US and Russia in Syria?

“Ultimately, the chances of direct confrontation are low, as there are still realists in Washington, especially in the military brass, who understand the inherent dangers of provoking Russia too much,” Draitser believes.

Still, there is a very real danger in all of this, the analyst warned.

“It is entirely possible that a Russian bombing campaign could eliminate US assets on the ground, including covert forces that have been operating in Syria for some time, or those who might be deployed in the near future. There is also the very real possibility that the US provides anti-aircraft weapons to the so called “moderates” which will then end up in the hands of ISIL or al-Nusra Front, and be used to shoot down Russian planes. In such a scenario, were it to be US-made, US-supplied anti-aircraft missiles, it could cause a very serious international incident,” Draitser told Sputnik.

“One should never discount the possibility of a Dr. Strangelove type mentality from taking hold on the US side. Of course, in this case, it would not be at all funny,” he added.

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