

# Denmark Withdraws from Airstrikes in Syria and Iraq, allegedly against ISIS-Daesh

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Global Research, December 03, 2016

[Derecho Internacional Público. Costa Rica 2](#)  
December 2016

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#), [SYRIA](#)

*Last Friday December 2, Denmark has announced officially that it will suspend its participation in airstrikes on Syria and Iraq. In this [press note](#) of The Local, we read that Danish Foreign Ministry Anders Samuelsen stated that “We have decided to withdraw the Danish fighter jets as planned”. A few days before, US top officials recognized errors during last operations, and in [this note](#) of The Local, it can be read that:*

Defence Command Denmark, the command centre for the Danish armed forces, released a short statement following the attack that confirmed that Danish fighter jets were part of the mission. **The Danish forces said it was “of course unfortunate if the coalition mistakenly struck anything other than ISIL forces.**

Last November 30, a [note](#) published in Australia stated that:

The United States-led review into the air strike released early Wednesday morning highlights two key points about the international coalition air war over Syria: first, that even the best planned military campaign will make mistakes and kill innocents, and second, that the Coalition air campaign has been one of the most tightly controlled in the history of air power. The remarkable thing is that more people haven't been wrongly killed by Coalition strikes. This constraint on air operations is legally and morally right, but the effect has been to render much of the Syrian air campaign useless. The review makes it clear that a number of factors contributed to inadvertently targeting a position near Dayr az Zawr, on 18 September occupied by Syrian Army or militia forces. For some reason intelligence reporting incorrectly identified the position as occupied by so-called Islamic State fighters.

Denmark and Belgium, as well as France, The Netherlands and United Kingdom are the only European countries engaged in airstrikes operations in Syria and Iraq of the so called “coalition against ISIS”. It is the first time that a European country decides to suspend its engagement in this kind of military operations. However, it is no the first time that airstrikes in Syria and Irak are suspended by a State: last February 22,2016, Canada officially suspended all operations consisting in bombing targets in Iraq and Syria, ending a controversial action inherited from Prime Minister Harper administration (see [pressnote](#)).

## DANISH INVOLVEMENT IN THE COALITION AGAINST ISIS

In the last report of Airwars.org (see [report](#) on November 2016 operations) the last mission

held by Denmark is dated December 1st,

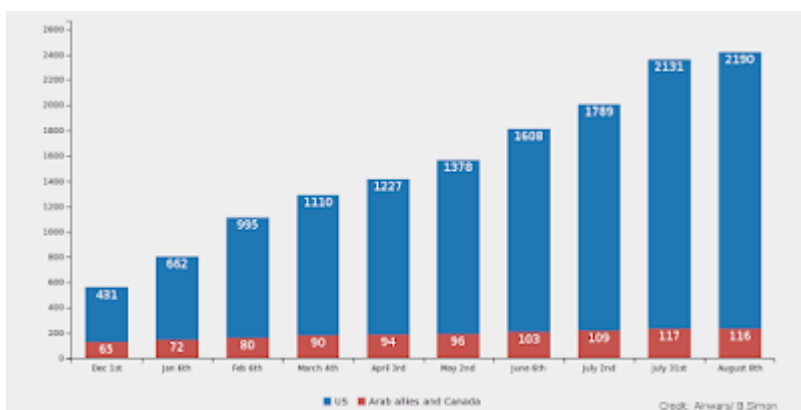
Update from Danish MoD on December 1st: [For Wednesday November 23rd to Wednesday November 30th, Denmark report 11 missions over the Iraqi province of Nineweh and the Syrian governorate of Ar Raqqa. They dropped eight precision bombs, launching attacks on ISIL roadblocks, buildings and facilities that manufactured improvised explosive devices to vehicles.]

We read in this [report](#) of Airwars of October 2015 that Denmark initially asked not to identify Danish operations in press releases:

Colonel Andersen confirmed that the Danish military had asked CENTCOM not to identify Danish actions in its press releases, though argued that the introduction of the 'partner nation' term was a result of "several interests that had to be united" rather than a Danish request exclusively. A FOIA request by Danish reporter Charlotte Aagaard later confirmed the Danish policy of rendering it impossible to identify Denmark's role in strikes, "neither directly or by through deduction", specifying that "the Danish contribution should not be mentioned in Coalition press releases if fewer than three nations are mentioned in relation to the activity in question." Under pressure from Danish media, mission updates were initially expanded in November to include the names of provinces and cities targeted - although dates and locations of attacks were still withheld.

In this other [report on The Netherlands transparency on airstrikes](#), it can be read that Dutch extreme discretion has suffered indiscretions twice: *"On only two occasions have the locations and dates of Dutch airstrikes in Iraq been revealed - on neither occasion by the Netherlands itself. Following a strike on Fallujah on July 25th 2015, France later reported it had carried out the mission with Dutch assistance: "Cette mission fut réalisée conjointement avec des avions américains et hollandais."* *5* And in September 2015, Airwars in collaboration with RTL Netherlands was able to show that according to a declassified CENTCOM document, Dutch aircraft had been implicated in a possible civilian casualty incident ten months earlier"

It must be recalled that since August 2014, US led coalition against Islamic State (ISIS) has decided to bomb Iraq and Syria territories. In the case of Syria, without the consent of Syrian authorities. The information provided officially is not necessarily very clear, and numbers differ from one official source to another one, but data base and reports elaborated by Airwars.org allow to have a better idea of the logic behind airstrikes campaign launched by the so called "coalition against ISIS".



*Chart on airstrikes in Syria, taken from this [report](#) of Airwars entitled: "First year of Coalition airstrikes helped stall Islamic State - but at a cost"*

An updated chart shows that at the date of November 27, 2016, **5673** airstrikes in Syria were launched by **US**, and **306** by **Canada, Australia, France, UK, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, Bahrain** and **Turkey** (see Chart "Cumulative US and allied airstrikes in Syria" available [here](#)).

In a recent special report from US Defense Secretary ([see text](#)), we read also that: "As of 6:45 a.m. EST Dec. 2, 2016, the U.S. and coalition have conducted a total of 16,592 strikes (10,590 Iraq / 6,002 Syria).

U.S. has conducted 12,876 strikes in Iraq and Syria (7,183 Iraq / 5,693 Syria).

Rest of Coalition has conducted 3,716 strikes in Iraq and Syria (3,407 Iraq / 309 Syria).

The countries that have participated in the strikes include: In Iraq: (1) Australia, (2) Belgium, (3) Canada, (4) Denmark, (5) France, (6) Jordan, (7) The Netherlands, and (8) UK.

In Syria: (1) Australia, (2) Bahrain, (3) Canada, (4) Denmark, (5) France, (6) Jordan, (7) The Netherlands, (8) Saudi Arabia, (9) Turkey (10) UAE and (11) UK.

Between Aug. 8, 2014 and Nov. 28, 2016, U.S. and partner nation aircraft have flown an estimated 127,764 sorties in support of operations in Iraq and Syria".

### **ONE YEAR AGO: THE DISCUSSION AT BRITISH PARLIAMENT**

One year ago, British Prime Minister appealed to Parliament Members to vote in favor of **Royal Air Forces (RAF)** airstrikes against Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria, in order to "keep the British people safe" from the threat of terrorism. At the opening of a 10-hour Commons debate on December 2, 2015, he said the country had no other choice. In the report presented to the Parliament he stated that:

I believe that the UK should now join Coalition airstrikes against ISIL in Syria" and pointed out that "On 20 November 2015, the UN Security Council unanimously called on Member States to use all necessary measures to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL, and to deny them safe haven in Syria and Iraq.

We have had the opportunity to clarify some of the very simple (and quite questionable) arguments presented by Primer Minister in our [article](#) entitled: "The UK Parliament's Decision to Bomb Syria is ILLEGAL Arguments based on UN resolution 2249 in Prime Minister's report on airstrikes in Syria: some clarifications needed".

### **AMBIGUITY OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2249 ADOPTED IN NOVEMBER 2015**

As known, Security Council 2249 (see [full text](#)) resolution does not provide any legal basis for airstrikes in Syria. A careful reading of the text shows that **Resolution 2249 does not mention Article 42 of the UN Charter, which allows Security Council to authorize States to the use of force, or even Chapter VII generally; nor does use the verb "decide", used when Security Council adopts a resolution on the use of force.**

However, this text has been presented as a solid legal basis for airstrikes in Syria by France and United Kingdom. In November 2015, two distinguished international lawyers entitled their analysis of Resolution 2249 (see [article](#)):

**The Constructive Ambiguity of the Security Council's ISIS Resolution**". For the authors of this article, the legal basis on which military actions can be taken in Syria is totally absent of the text: "Resolution 2249, on the other hand, is constructed in such a way that it can be used to provide political support for military action, without actually endorsing any particular legal theory on which such action can be based or providing legal authority from the Council itself. The creative ambiguity in this resolution lies not only in the fact that it does not legally endorse military action, while appearing to give Council support to action being taken, but also that it allows for continuing disagreement as to the legality of those actions.

With respect to the vote that took place on December 2nd 2015 in London, and, in particular to the arguments presented by Prime Minister concerning UNSC Resolution 2249, a distinguished professor of international law at Nottingham wrote in his [article](#) entitled "**How the Ambiguity of Resolution 2249 Does Its Work**" the following conclusion:

Calling this particular resolution "clear and unambiguous" is, with respect, a real howler. But nonetheless we can see how the ambiguity of the resolution also did its magic in internal UK politics, and not just on the international plane - I very much doubt that without it the Prime Minister could have obtained the necessary majority for the air strikes, or even if he did that majority would have been slim indeed.

## **WHO ARE REALLY THE MEMBERS OF COALITION AGAINST ISIS**

It must be recalled that in a [report](#) of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons entitled "*The extension of offensive British military operations to Syria*", information was provided in order to know which were the States involved in airstrikes in Syria (and in Iraq). At note 22, page 9, we read the following data, that refers to **Denmark withdrawn**:

Airstrikes in Iraq: US, UK, Australia, Belgium (withdrawn), Canada (expected to withdraw), Denmark (withdrawn), France, Jordan, The Netherlands (9).  
Airstrikes in Syria: US, Australia, Bahrain, Canada (expected to withdraw), France, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, UAE (9). Total of 13 states overall.

The decision of Denmark to "withdraw" airstrikes in Iraq has been revised after been registered by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons at the end of 2015. On April 20, 2016, we read from US Defense Secretary the following statement:

**Statement from Secretary of Defense Ash Carter on Denmark's Decision to Expand Role in Counter-ISIL Campaign** Press Operations Release No: NR-139-16 April 20, 2016

This week's decision by the Danish Parliament to approve an expanded role in the fight against ISIL is a welcome contribution from a valued partner in the counter-ISIL coalition and another sign of the growing momentum for the

campaign to defeat ISIL. Denmark is a steadfast partner in global coalition efforts. Its contributions, including strike aircraft, air defense radar, and training and assistance to Iraqi forces, have already been significant.

Concerning the participation of others members of the so called “*coalition against ISIS*”, on Nov. 30, 2015 The Washington Times informed (see [note](#)) that some members of the coalition have stopped flights against ISIS positions:

One Pentagon official directly involved in the counter-Islamic State fight told The Washington Times that the Saudis haven’t flown a mission against the group in nearly three months. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that Bahrain is still involved, but confirmed that Jordan stopped flying sorties against the extremists in August and the UAE hasn’t flown one since March.

**Curiously**, in its [presentation](#) at the “Sénat” in France, on November 25, 2015 French Minister of Foreign Affairs declares publicly that: “*Une trentaine d’État sont engagés militairement dans la coalition*”. The number 13 is a number of member States quite far from 30. But visually speaking (mainly if you are an urged person acting as a Minister of Foreign Affairs) the number 13 is very close to 31.

## **A COLLECTIVE CALL AGAINST ABUSIVE INVOCATION OF SELF DEFENSE TO JUSTIFY AIRSTRIKES IN SYRIA AND IRAQ**

Last July 2016, we have had the opportunity to refer to a **collective call against the abusive invocation of self-defense in the fight against ISIS**, signed by more than 240 international law professors and experts around the world. The text of this global call (available [here](#)) in French, English, Portuguese, Spanish and Arabic) considers, among other arguments, that:

Thus, numerous military interventions have been conducted in the name of self-defence, including against Al Qaeda, ISIS or affiliated groups. While some have downplayed these precedents on account of their exceptional nature, there is a serious risk of self-defence becoming an alibi, used systematically to justify the unilateral launching of military operations around the world. Without opposing the use of force against terrorist groups as a matter of principle — particularly in the current context of the fight against ISIS — we, international law professors and scholars, consider this invocation of self-defence to be problematic. In fact, international law provides for a range of measures to fight terrorism. Priority should be given to these measures before invoking self-defence .

On this collective call, we refer to our modest [article](#) entitled “*Against the abusive invocation of self-defence against terrorism*” and to the updated list of signatures collected, available [here](#).

*Publicado por Curso de Derecho Internacional. Costa Rica en [10:04](#)*

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