

# “Humanitarian Air Strikes” against Syria: U.S. Breaks International Law, Again

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Global Research, September 24, 2014

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

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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*The United States, assisted by a handful of Arab nations, [conducted](#) air strikes on Syria on 23<sup>rd</sup> September. The attacks mark a striking expansion in America’s military campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and have occurred without the consent of the Syrian government. A U.S. State Department official confirmed that the Syrian government was not asked for authorisation, [saying](#): “We did not seek the regime’s permission, we didn’t coordinate our actions with the Syrian government, and Secretary [of State John] Kerry did not send a letter to the Syrian regime.” The U.S. airstrikes are therefore a clear violation of international law, as Damascus had earlier [said](#) that any direct action by the United States within Syria would constitute an act of war and a breach of its sovereignty.*

The U.S. administration lawyers have used spurious [excuses](#), invoking Iraq’s right to self-defence and the weakness of the Assad government as twin justifications for U.S. bombing in Syria. However, the fact of the matter is: without United Nations authorisation or approval from the Syrian government, airstrikes on Syria are a violation of basic international law. The legal circumlocutions to avoid requesting a UN Security Council resolution match similar efforts to avoid requesting specific legal authority from the U.S. Congress. Fearing that U.S. politicians up for re-election in November may balk at voting for a third military attack on Iraq and being sucked into a Syrian quagmire, the White House has avoided seeking a fresh authorisation of the use of military force, preferring to rely on early authorisations against al-Qaida granted after the 11 September 2001 attacks.

The President of the Middle East Institute, Yevgeny Satanovsky, [summarised](#) succinctly the illegitimacy of the airstrikes, saying: “The fact that Washington has notified Syria’s UN envoy of air strikes against militants’ positions in the territory of Syria does not change anything. Aggression will be aggression. The UN Security Council’s resolution 2170 of August 15 envisaged creation of a basis for a collective international response to the threat from the Islamic State that has emerged in Iraq and Syria, but gave Washington no right to use force against a sovereign country.”

It is important to note that recent testimony by US intelligence and homeland security officials in Washington have [acknowledged](#) that Syrian groups such as Isis are not known to be planning any direct attacks on the U.S. Thus, in bombing Islamic State targets in Syria, the United States cannot credibly claim that it used force in self-defence or at the request of the Syrian state exercising lawful force to suppress rebellion.

The United States has a vast track record of breaking international law. It did so, for

example, in March 1999, when along with its NATO allies it [launched](#) an extended bombing campaign in Serbia. In this case also, the United States could not claim it was acting in self-defence. Nor was military action authorised by the UN Security Council. In addition, the U.S. government is making sure not to mention the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, which also rested on erroneous claims of weapons of mass destruction and arguably contributed to its current instability.

As always, American allies have remained silent over this blatant refusal to follow international law. Only Russia has forcefully condemned the illegality of the airstrikes. In its statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry [warned](#): “Any such action can be carried out only in accordance with international law. That implies not a formal, one-sided ‘notification’ of airstrikes but the presence of explicit consent from the government of Syria or a corresponding UN Security Council decision.” Describing the U.S.-led move as a bid to “achieve one’s own geopolitical goals,” the Russian Ministry said the airstrikes would only “exacerbate tensions and further destabilize the situation.”

The point about “achieving one’s own geopolitical goals” is crucial here, as it is highly likely that the U.S. administration is once again on a mission to carry out another regime change, with President Bashar al-Assad being the main target.

As the United States and its allies continue to lecture other states on international law and respecting sovereignty, once again the preacher has become the main violator of what is being preached. It looks like the hypocritical nature of the United States knows no bounds.

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