

Is Washington Considering a Full-Scale Drone War over Syria?

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Will the Obama administration launch a full scale drone war over Syria in the coming months ahead? Public support for Washington to order a direct military intervention against the Syrian government because it is accused of using chemical weapons against civilians is at the lowest level in 20 years according to a Gallop Poll conducted on September 2013.

More than 51% of Americans oppose military action and 13% are unsure if military action is practical.

In February 2013, US Press Secretary Jay Carney stated to the public, the ethical and “wise” use of drones that can pinpoint targets without of course killing innocent civilians is legal:

We have acknowledged, the United States, that sometimes we use remotely piloted aircraft to conduct targeted strikes against specific al Qaeda terrorists in order to prevent attacks on the United States and to save American lives. We conduct those strikes because they are necessary to mitigate ongoing actual threats, to stop plots, prevent future attacks, and, again, save American lives. These strikes are legal, they are ethical and they are wise. The U.S. government takes great care in deciding to pursue an al Qaeda terrorist, to ensure precision and to avoid loss of innocent life

Washington did consider launching drone strikes in the same year as reported by the Los Angeles Times ‘CIA begins sizing up Islamic extremists in Syria for drone strikes’:

The CIA has stepped up secret contingency planning to protect the United States and its allies as the turmoil expands in Syria, including collecting intelligence on Islamic extremists for the first time for possible lethal drone strikes, according to current and former U.S. officials.

President Obama has not authorized drone missile strikes in Syria, however, and none are under consideration

Obama’s speech on his drone policy had concerns on the public’s attitude towards another war in the Middle East. Obama said the following on the use of drones in foreign land:

Any U.S. military action in foreign lands risks creating more enemies and impacts public opinion overseas. Moreover, our laws constrain the power of the

President even during wartime, and I have taken an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States. The very precision of drone strikes and the necessary secrecy often involved in such actions can end up shielding our government from the public scrutiny that a troop deployment invites. It can also lead a President and his team to view drone strikes as a cure-all for terrorism

In a recent meeting between French President Francois Hollande and President Obama to discuss issues in the Middle East and Africa, Obama was asked about the situation in Syria:

I've said throughout my presidency that I always reserve the right to exercise military action on behalf of America's national security interests. But that has to be deployed wisely. And I think that what we saw with respect to the chemical weapons situation was an example of the judicious, wise use of possible military action

The Obama administration refers to the use of military action and how it is deployed as a "wise" option. Is he talking about the use of drone warfare? He later continued his statement saying that the Syrian situation is "Fluid":

Whether we can duplicate that kind of process when it comes to the larger resolution of the problem, right now we don't think that there is a military solution, per se, to the problem. But the situation is fluid, and we are continuing to explore every possible avenue to solve this problem, because it's not just heartbreaking to see what's happening to the Syrian people, it's very dangerous for the region as a whole, including friends and allies and partners like Lebanon or Jordan that are being adversely impacted by it

The Obama administration can possibly launch a full scale drone war on Syria without involving ground troops since the public is opposed to another direct military intervention in the Middle East. Washington still has its hands tied with troops remaining in Afghanistan. Relations with President Hamid Karzai are strained. President Karzai refused to sign a security pact allowing 10,000 US troops to stay in Afghanistan for counter-terrorism purposes and training Afghan forces beyond 2014. Karzai also wants limited NATO troops in Afghanistan. With US and Israeli troops in preparation for a possible confrontation with Iran if nuclear talks fail, the use of drones would be a viable option for Washington since it would strike a delicate balance with the international community and the American public concerning their attitudes towards a new war using ground troops. A full-scale drone war launched by Washington would seem like a low-intensity war to the public, meaning that a drone war is not really a "major war" involving US troops on the ground, as President Obama said in his 2013 drone policy speech "such actions can end up shielding our government from the public scrutiny".

Washington would hope that the American public and the international community would not organize anti-war protests regarding America's 21st century drone war against President Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian people involving so-called "precision" strikes. War is war, regardless of what some people in power may think. The public wants no war against Syria, but will Washington and its allies listen? That is a good question.

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