

Marines Hold Eight Days of Drills with Militants in Southern Syria

By [Press TV](#)

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US marines have held eight days of unprecedented military exercises with US-backed militants in southern Syria in an attempt to send a “strong message” to Iran and Russia, a senior military official said.

Colonel Sean Ryan, a US military spokesman, described the drills as “a show of force,” saying that the Pentagon had notified Russia through “deconfliction” channels to prevent “miscommunication or escalate tension”.

“The exercise was conducted to reinforce our capabilities and ensure we are ready to respond to any threat to our forces within our area of operations,” he noted.

The eight days of drills ended this week at the US military outpost in Tanf, located 24 km to the west from the al-Tanf border crossing between Syria and Iraq in Homs Governorate, said **Colonel Muhanad al Talaa**, the commander of the US-backed Maghawir al Thawra militant group.

He told Reuters the war games were the first such exercises with live-fire air and ground assault, involving hundreds of US troops and militants operating against the government of **President Bashar al-Assad**.

Thawra claimed the drills were meant to send what he described as “a strong message to Russia and Iran” that the Americans and the militants intended to stay and confront any threats to their presence.

The US presence in Tanf military base is illegal and lacks the permission of the Syrian government. Damascus, Moscow, and Tehran have repeatedly denounced the American military presence in Syria and called on the US to withdraw its marines from the base. However, the US has so far refused to pull its forces out, and even moved to deploy hundreds of more marines in Tanf earlier this month.

The new forces have reportedly joined “special operations troops already based in the garrison” and are going to participate in the drills amid an escalation of US-Russian tensions in Syria and Russia’s military exercises in the Mediterranean.

Meanwhile, the [CNN](#) cited several US military officials as saying last Friday that Russia

had warned the Pentagon twice in the past weeks that its forces, together with Syrian troops, were prepared to wage an attack on terrorists in the area where dozens of US troops are stationed - including those in Tanf garrison.

Reacting to Moscow's warnings, US military officials "bluntly warned Russia and Syria not to go forward with an attack within a 35-mile-wide security zone that the US maintains around Tanf," *Task & Purpose* further reported.

The US illegally built the military outpost in early 2016 under the pretext of fighting Daesh terrorists, but it has declared a 55 km-radius "deconfliction zone" off-limits to others, providing a safe haven for at least 50,000 militants and their families in the Rukban camp that lies within it.

This is while US President Donald Trump had previously stated that he wanted American troops out of Syria as soon as possible and has also called for redirecting millions of dollars meant to help rebuild Syria to other military projects.

Russian and Iranian military forces are in Syria at the official request of the Syrian government. This is while the US has involved itself in the Syrian conflict through an overt campaign meant to train and support anti-Damascus terrorists. The government of President Bashar al-Assad has repeatedly denounced the American military presence in the country and called on Washington to end what it has described as an "uninvited aggression" against Syria.

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Michel Chossudovsky

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