

# Obama Vows Protracted Military Campaign in Iraq, Syria

By [Bill Van Auken](#)

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President Barack Obama delivered a militarist speech Tuesday to the annual convention of the American Legion in Charlotte, North Carolina amid reports that US spy drones are already operating over Syria and air strikes could begin there by the end of this week.

Obama told the veterans' organization that "the United States is and will remain the one indispensable nation in the world," a boast that is belied by the bloody debacle unleashed throughout North Africa and the Middle East by a string of US military interventions in Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Turning to the present intervention in Iraq following the overrunning of much of the country by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a split-off from Al Qaeda, the US president reiterated the formal pretexts for US military action: protecting "our diplomats and military advisors who are there," and humanitarian assistance.

He vowed that "American combat troops will not be returning to fight in Iraq," and declared that the "answer is not to send in large-scale military deployments." Both formulations leave open the deployment of thousands of US "advisors" and Special Operations troops, which are not defined in military terminology as "combat troops," a term reserved for full regular Army brigades and Marine expeditionary units.

Since launching the first US air strikes in Iraq last month, the Obama administration has already rushed another 1,000 US troops into the country. The US Central Command reported two more air strikes on Tuesday near the Iraqi Kurdish capital of Irbil. The targets were reported to be ISIS armored vehicles, likely captured from the US-supplied Iraqi Army stockpile. Thus far, the US has carried out roughly 100 air strikes in Iraq.

Obama spoke Tuesday of "a broader strategy" that would supposedly include arming local forces, including the Iraqi government, the Iraqi Kurdish militia and the "moderate opposition in Syria," and forging an "international coalition." But he vowed that his administration "will continue to take direct action where needed to protect our people and defend our homeland." He invoked the barbaric execution of American photojournalist James Foley as a pretext for American military action, declaring that "justice will be done."

Obama went on to warn that "rooting out a cancer like ISIL [an alternate name for ISIS] won't be easy and it won't be quick," indicating that Washington is preparing for an expanding and protracted military intervention in the region.

The US president provided no specifics on the escalating US operations, but government

officials who spoke on condition of anonymity said Tuesday that US spy planes were already deployed over Syria in preparation for US air strikes.

NBC news reported Tuesday that the spy flights involved both manned aircraft and unmanned drones. It cited US officials as saying that, while no decision had yet been made, Obama could authorize air strikes by the end of this week.

Meanwhile, Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters onboard a military plane en route to Afghanistan that, while he believes at present ISIS represents a “regional threat” and not a direct threat to the US, he is prepared to shift this assessment. Once the general “determines that the Islamic militants in Iraq have become a direct threat to the US homeland,” the Associated Press reported, “he will recommend that the US military move directly against the group in Syria.”

The clear implication is that the United States is just one purported “terrorist plot” away from a direct military intervention in yet another Middle Eastern country.

The evident political complication confronting the US administration as it prepares to extend its military action in Iraq into neighboring Syria is that it is proposing to bomb forces it previously supported as “rebels” against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

Just one year ago, Obama was seeking congressional approval to bomb Syrian government forces on the fabricated pretext that the Assad regime had crossed a “red line” by using chemical weapons in the civil war with ISIS and other Sunni Islamist forces. He was compelled to back down from this threat in the face of massive popular opposition as well as the failure of either the US Congress or the British Parliament to back direct military intervention.

Now, utilizing the atrocities committed by ISIS, including the beheading of Foley, the administration does not expect to encounter significant opposition in Washington or London or even demands that it seek congressional authorization for a bombing campaign.

There were reports Tuesday that the US is already collaborating indirectly with the Assad regime by providing intelligence from US spy flights to the Syrian military, which conducted dozens of bombing raids on ISIS strongholds in eastern Syria on Tuesday. According to the AFP news agency, “The cooperation has already begun and the United States is giving Damascus information via Baghdad and Moscow.”

The only direct official response to the report was a tweet from State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf asserting that “the claims in that story are false.”

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem declared on Monday that the Syrian government was prepared “to cooperate and coordinate” with other countries in combating ISIS, but warned that any unilateral air strikes carried out without the approval of Damascus would be “considered aggression.”

White House press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Tuesday, “There are no plans to coordinate with the Assad regime” on any military action within Syria.

The clear implication is that, while Washington is preparing to intervene in Syria on the pretense of defeating ISIS, its goal remains regime-change—the toppling of what would be a third secular Arab head of state, following the overthrow and killing of Iraq’s Saddam

Hussein and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi.

Behind the rhetoric about protecting Americans and combating terror, US imperialism is prepared to unleash an even more catastrophic regional war to further its drive to break up the current state structures and assert its hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East.

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