

Saudi Arabia Makes “Final” Decision To Send Troops To Syria As US, Russia Spar Over Aleppo Strikes

By [Zero Hedge](#)
Global Research, February 12, 2016
[Zero Hedge](#) 11 February 2016

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)
In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

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Last summer, Bashar al-Assad’s army was on the ropes, as the SAA fought a multi-front war against a dizzying array of rebel forces including ISIS. Then Quds commander Qassem Soleimani went to Russia. After that, everything changed.

As of September 30 the Russian air force began flying combat missions from Latakia, rolling back rebel gains and paving the way for a Hezbollah ground offensive. Once Moscow had stopped the bleeding for the SAA (both figuratively and literally), Iran called up Shiite militias from Iraq who, alongside Hassan Nasrallah’s forces, pushed north towards Aleppo.

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The only thing that can save the rebels at this juncture is a direct intervention by the groups’ Sunni benefactors including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Turkey.

That, or an intervention by the US.

Both the Saudis and the Turkey have hinted at ground invasions over the past two weeks and just this morning, a [sokesman said](#) **Riyadh’s decision to send in troops was**

“final.”

But direct interventions are tricky. Russia has never denied it intends to bolster Syrian government forces against the rebels, all of whom Moscow deems “terrorists.” On the other hand, Washington, Riyadh, Doha, and Ankara cling to the notion that while they don’t support Assad, they’re primary goal is to fight ISIS. Well ISIS is in Raqqa, which is nowhere near Aleppo, meaning there’s no way to help the rebels out in their fight against the Russians, Iranians, and Hezbollah under the guise of battling Islamic State.

Against that backdrop **we found it interesting that Moscow and Washington are now delivering conflicting accounts of airstrikes in Aleppo on Wednesday. The Pentagon, without specifying what time the strikes allegedly took place, says Russia destroyed the city’s two main hospitals.**

Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov notes that Warren didn’t provide either hospitals’ coordinates, or the time of the airstrikes, or sources of information. “Absolutely nothing,” he said, describing Warren’s report.

The Kremlin, on the other hand, says US warplanes conducted strikes at 1355 Moscow time. “Two U.S. Air Force A-10 attack aircraft entered Syrian airspace from Turkish territory,” Konashenkov said in a statement. **“Reaching Aleppo by the most direct path, they made strikes against objects in the city.”**

“Only aviation of the anti-ISIS coalition flew over the city yesterday,” he added.

“When asked on Wednesday whether the U.S.-led coalition could do more to help rebels in Aleppo or improve access for humanitarian aid to the city, Pentagon spokesman Colonel Steve Warren said that the coalition’s focus remained on fighting Islamic State,” [Reuters wrote](#) on Thursday. The group is “virtually non-existent in that part of Syria,” Warren said.

Right. Which makes you wonder what two US Air Force A-10 attack planes were doing bombing in and around Aleppo. Is the US set to conduct airstrikes in support of the rebels, thus marking a fresh and exceptionally dangerous escalation of hostilities in the country?

As for what exactly it was that the US warplanes struck, Konashenkov will have to get back to us. He’s too busy winning a war to care right now:

I’m going to be honest with you: we did not have enough time to clarify what exactly those nine objects bombed out by US planes in Aleppo yesterday were. We will look more carefully.

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Below, find excerpts from [“Will Russian Victories In Syria Spark A Regional War?”](#) by Yaroslav Trofimov as originally published in WSJ

Defying U.S. predictions of a quagmire in Syria, Russia is achieving strategic victories there with this month’s [Aleppo offensive](#). The question now is whether this is a turning point that hastens the five-year war’s end or the trigger for a counter-escalation that will drag other regional countries into the conflict.

Few expect that Moscow's main target—the moderate rebels backed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the U.S.—would now be forced settle the conflict on the Kremlin's, and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's, terms.

"Their victory in Aleppo is not the end of the war. It's the beginning of a new war," said Moncef Marzouki, who served in 2011-14 as the president of Tunisia, the nation that kicked off the Arab Spring, and who recently visited the Turkish-Syrian border. "Now, everybody would intervene."

To be sure, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have [few easy options](#) to counter Russian military might in Syria. But because of national pride—and internal politics—neither can really afford to have the rebel cause in which they have invested so much wiped out by Moscow and its Iranian allies.

While the Obama administration has long been determined to minimize U.S. involvement there, for Turkey and Saudi Arabia the prospect of Syria falling under the sway of Russia and Iran would be a national-security catastrophe.

"The whole situation, not just for Turkey but for the entire Middle East, would be reshaped. The Western influence will fade away. The question is: Can we accept Russia, and the Iranians, calling the tune in the region?" said Umit Pamiir, a former Turkish ambassador to NATO and the United Nations.

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