

US Military to Initiate Operations in Syria

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Global Research, August 26, 2014

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

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The Obama administration has ordered the start of US military operations inside Syria, in addition to ongoing air strikes and renewed troop deployments in Iraq. Officials from US Central Command in the Middle East informed the *Wall Street Journal* late Monday that “the Pentagon is preparing to conduct reconnaissance flights over Syria.” The surveillance missions would be aimed at gathering the necessary information to carry out air strikes and possible ground assaults.

The pretext for military operations into Syria is to curb the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Sunni-based Islamist force that has captured much of eastern Syria during the country’s three-year civil war and which this year seized large areas of western and northern Iraq. The US began air attacks on ISIS in Iraq earlier this month, claiming they would be limited to preventing the massacre of thousands of members of the Yazidi religious minority. The air campaign soon escalated into providing air support to Kurdish offensives to retake Mosul Dam and pushing ISIS fighters back from positions they held within 30 kilometres of Erbil, the capital of Iraq’s autonomous Kurdish region.

Last week, General Martin Dempsey, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, laid out the justification for extending the air war into Syria, telling a press conference: “Can they [ISIS] be defeated without addressing that part of the organisation that resides in Syria? The answer is no.” The murder of American journalist James Foley, who was being held prisoner in Syria by ISIS, has been seized upon throughout the American political and media establishment to call for attacks to begin.

The corporate media has also extensively reported the weekend capture by ISIS forces of the last Syrian Army base in eastern Syria, the Taqba air base in the largely ISIS-held province of Raqqa. After heavy fighting last week, Syrian troops abandoned their defence of the facility on Sunday after suffering several hundred casualties. Some soldiers captured by the Islamists were reportedly beheaded. ISIS forces in Syria have been able to deploy armoured vehicles, artillery and other weapons captured from US-equipped Iraqi government units.

The fall of Taqba is being used to amplify the Obama White House’s portrayal of ISIS as a threat to “US interests” in the Middle East and throughout the world. Behind such self-serving assertions is the reality that the United States is now directly intervening into a civil war in Syria in which Washington has provided tacit backing to ISIS and other Islamist groupings to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Since 2011, the Obama administration and its European allies have openly supported the armed rebellion against the Syrian regime by various militias, while downplaying or denying

the fact that Al Qaeda-linked extremists were the main forces fighting the Damascus government. Vast amounts of military hardware and training have been supplied to the rebels by US proxies such as Turkey and the Gulf States monarchies. Much of it ended up in the hands of ISIS, providing the very weapons that it used to launch its incursion into Iraq against the Shiite-dominated US client regime in Baghdad.

At least 200,000 people have lost their lives, 2.5 million turned into refugees and 6.5 million displaced due to the intrigues of Washington and its allies in Syria. The statements from the Pentagon make clear that whatever attacks are made on ISIS, it is not the only, or even the primary, target of US intervention in Syria. Officials told the *Wall Street Journal* on Monday night that American military forces “would enter Syrian airspace without any Syrian regime approval or authorisation.”

That was the White House’s answer to a statement issued Monday by the Syrian government that “any [US] strike which is not coordinated with the government will be considered as aggression.” It appealed for “cooperation” with Washington. The Pentagon spokesmen dismissed the warning and offer of collaboration, telling the *Journal* that “Syrian air defense systems in eastern Syria won’t pose a threat because sensors are either sparsely located or inoperable.”

In comments earlier Monday, State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki declared: “Just because the Syrian regime may be taking on Islamic State ... it certainly doesn’t mean we’re on the same side of the coin here.”

Such statements indicate that an intervention against ISIS could be used to take forward Washington’s objective of regime change in Damascus. The immediate prospect that looms is armed clashes between the Syrian air force and US war planes.

In just one of the many admissions that US policy is wracked by glaring contradictions, Fox News commented: “[A] US campaign to weaken the Islamic State militants could actually strengthen a leader the White House has sought to push from office. Obama could try to counteract that awkward dynamic by also targeting Assad’s forces, though that could drag the US into the bloody, complex conflict.”

The US and its European allies pulled back last September from launching a massive air assault on the Assad regime in the face of popular opposition at home and concerns over a confrontation with Russia and Iran, which both back Assad. Barely a year later, the Obama administration is preparing to launch military operations in Syria, where Iran is believed to have significant military forces and when relations with Russia have dramatically deteriorated due to the crisis in Ukraine. Moreover, there remains no support in the American population for a new war in the Middle East.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated yesterday that the US and its allies had “to choose what is more important: to change the regime, and satisfy personal antipathies with the risk that the situation will crumble, or find pragmatic ways to join efforts against the common threat.”

The Obama administration has ruled out working with Assad regime and is leaving open the option of military operations in support of regime change. At the same time, the White House has flatly rejected any suggestion that it requires congressional approval to open a war in Syria, which would rapidly accelerate regional and international tensions.

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