

French Colonel Slams US Tactics Against ISIS-Daesh in Syria, Accuses Washington of “Prolonging the Conflict”

Faces punishment for saying US focus on limiting risks to own troops drove up price for civilians, allowed ISIS to survive longer, prolonged the war

By [Middle East Monitor](#)

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A senior French officer faces punishment after publicly condemning the US-led coalition’s military tactics against Daesh in the east of Syria, accusing Washington of prolonging the conflict and disregarding a growing civilian death toll, the army said on Saturday.

Colonel Francois-Regis Legrier – who has been in charge of directing French artillery supporting Kurdish-led groups in Syria since October – said the coalition’s focus had been on limiting its own risks and this had greatly increased the death toll among civilians, as well as raised the level of destruction.

“Yes, the Battle of Hajin [near Syria’s eastern border with Iraq] was won, at least on the ground but by refusing ground engagement, we unnecessarily prolonged the conflict and thus contributed to increasing the number of casualties in the population,” Legrier wrote in an article in the National Defence Review.

France is one of the main allies in the US-led coalition fighting Daesh in Syria and Iraq, with its warplanes used to strike militant targets, its heavy-artillery backing Kurdish-led fighters and its special forces leading the ground assault.

“We have massively destroyed the infrastructure and given the population a disgusting image of what may be a Western-style liberation leaving behind the seeds of an imminent resurgence of a new adversary,” he said, in rare public criticism by a serving officer.

“We have in no way won the war because we lack a realistic and lasting policy and an adequate strategy,” Legrier said. “How many Hajins will it take to understand that we are on the wrong track?”

Legrier’s article has embarrassed French authorities just days before the coalition is expected to [announce the defeat](#) of the terror group; the article was removed from the review’s website on Saturday.

“A punishment is being considered,” French army spokesman Patrick Steiger

confirmed to reporters.

Hajin was the last major towns held by Daesh militants and was the target of the final phase of “Operation Roundup” that started September, with [heavy battles](#) also centring on the Al-Shafah area near the Iraqi border. Six months on, a rapidly-diminishing few hundred militants have been battling on the eastern banks of the Euphrates River, hemmed in by US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on the Syrian side of the Iraqi border and by Iranian-backed Shia militias on the other.

Yet the battle has proved difficult with Daesh militants fiercely resisting SDF attempts to capture their final stronghold, despite hundreds of Kurdish fighters – including heavy military equipment – sent [as reinforcements](#) over the course of the fighting.

Although the SDF were also supported by fighter jets from the international coalition, strategically positioned minefields placed by Daesh reportedly significantly slowed the ground assault, causing the operation to be [temporarily halted](#) in November.

The coalition could have got rid of just 2,000 militant fighters – who lacked air support or modern technological equipment – much more quickly and effectively by sending in just 1,000 troops, Legrier argued.

“This refusal raises a question: why have an army that we don’t dare use?” he said.

Human rights groups have repeatedly criticised the US-led bombing campaign, which has resulted in the deaths of scores of civilians over the past six months; to date, some 700 civilians – over 250 of whom were children – have been killed, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Thousands of civilians have fled the area, with the Al-Houl refugee camp in north-eastern Syria currently hosting over 39,000 people, mainly women and children.

In October, some 54 people – including 12 children – were killed in [a single strike on a mosque](#) in the town of Al-Susah, near the Iraqi border. The US alleged that the mosque was being used as a base by Daesh operatives; some 22 militants were also killed in the blast. Despite being hit during the weekly Friday congregational prayer, a popular time for civilians, the military claimed it targeted the mosque when only fighters were present.

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