

In Preparation for Wider War, Pentagon deploys Task Force in Jordan

By [Bill Van Auken](#)

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In preparation for a direct US intervention in Syria and a wider war in the Middle East, the Pentagon has secretly deployed a 150-strong military task force in Jordan.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta Wednesday confirmed the existence of the task force, which was first reported by the *New York Times*. Speaking to the media at the close of a two-day NATO defense ministers meeting in Brussels, Panetta stated, “We have a group of our forces there working to help build a headquarters there and to insure that we make the relationship between the United States and Jordan a strong one so that we can deal with all the possible consequences of what’s happening in Syria.”

Panetta said that the US force in Jordan was also tasked with ensuring the security of chemical and biological weapons inside Syria. President Barack Obama has declared that any use of such weapons would represent a “red line” that would shift US policy toward direct military intervention in Syria.

In Syria, just as in Iraq a decade ago, the alleged threat from “weapons of mass destruction” is being readied as a pretext for a US war of aggression.

The *Times* article revealed that “the idea of establishing a buffer zone between Syria and Jordan—which would be enforced by Jordanian forces on the Syrian side of the border—had been discussed in conjunction with the setting up of the US military outpost, located near the Syrian border. Creating such a zone would be possible only in coordination with a massive US intervention.

According to the *Times* report, “the outpost near Amman could play a broader role should American policy change” and Washington decide to launch such an intervention.

Jordan’s military, meanwhile, flatly denied the US presence. The state-run news agency, Petra, quoted a spokesman of the country’s armed forces as stating: “News reports that the United States is helping Jordan deal with Syrian refugees or face dangers related to chemical weapons are not true. The Jordanian forces are capable of facing any kind of threats.”

The spokesman went on to say that any foreign military presence was “to conduct an annual and routine military exercise” and “has nothing to do with any regional issues or developments.”

The origins of the previously secret US deployment in Jordan date back to last May, when the Pentagon sent American troops, including Special Forces units, to the country to

participate in joint military exercises dubbed Operation Eager Lion. Afterwards, some 100 military personnel stayed behind and were joined by dozens more who were flown in. The task force, according to the *Times*, is commanded by a “senior American officer.”

The task force is headquartered in a Jordanian military base built into an abandoned quarry north of the Jordanian capital of Amman. Just 35 miles from the Syrian border, it is the closest US military deployment to Syria’s civil war, in which Washington is backing a collection of Islamist and sectarian militias as a proxy force in a campaign to oust President Bashar al-Assad and replace him with a more pliant puppet regime.

The military deployment in Jordan parallels the CIA’s establishment of a similar command-and-control base near the US Incirlik Air Force Base in Turkey, where it is coordinating the arming of the so-called Syrian rebels with weapons and munitions provided by Turkey and Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf Sunni monarchies.

The *New York Times* article suggests that the principal concern of the US military contingent in Jordan has been dealing with the influx of an estimated 180,000 refugees from neighboring Syria.

“Members of the American task force are spending the bulk of their time working with the Jordanian military on logistics—figuring out how to deploy tons of food, water and latrines to the border, for example, and training the Jordanian military to handle the refugees,” according to the *Times*.

The article offers no explanation of why the US military is uniquely suited for providing relief for refugees, having created millions of them over the course of the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Jordan’s treatment of the refugees from Syria has been so brutal that it has provoked riots. Protests have been put down by heavily armed police at the Zaatari refugee camp, which was set up in the middle of the desert.

The unnamed “American officials familiar with the operation” who spoke to the newspaper are attempting to provide a humanitarian cover for the preparation of a new explosion of US militarism in the region.

If Washington and the Pentagon are concerned about the refugees flowing into Jordan, it is, on the one hand, for their possible use as a pretext for intervention and, on the other, over their potential for intensifying the political crisis of the Jordanian monarchy, which heads one of the most servile US client states in the region.

In a report released last week, the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the nonpartisan research arm of the US Congress, acknowledged: “King Abdullah II is facing an emboldened opposition that has grown more openly critical in recent years of continued royal rule, particularly as Jordan continues to suffer from high unemployment, high underemployment, and a large fiscal deficit. Small scale protests in Jordan have become a regular occurrence, not only in the capital of Amman, but in more rural tribal areas in the south once considered to be a bedrock of support for the government. Though economic grievances remain paramount, concern over high-level corruption and continued restrictions on political freedoms also has generated unrest.”

Last Friday saw a demonstration of tens of thousands in Amman, with protesters chanting,

“The people want the regime to go,” and marching behind banners reading, “Down with all unelected governments,” and, “We prefer to die rather than live a humiliating life.”

As the Jordanian regime has faced rising internal opposition, the US has increased the aid upon which it depends. According to the CRS report, Washington is providing Jordan with \$360 million in economic support funds and over \$300 million in military aid during the current fiscal year. Since 1951, the US has poured some \$13.1 billion into propping up the Hashemite monarchy’s rule over the country.

The revelations about the secret military base in Jordan are one more indication of the advanced state of US preparations for a new and more devastating war in the Middle East.

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Articles by: [Bill Van Auken](#)

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