

Obama Marshals Allies for War on Syria and Iraq

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In the lead-up to this week's UN General Assembly meetings, the Obama administration is engaged in an aggressive political campaign to justify and marshal support for the extension of its war in Iraq into Syria. Under the pretext of "degrading and destroying" Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militias, the US is engaged in an illegal war of aggression with the objective of ousting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Claims by American officials that Washington has the support of 40 countries cannot obscure the fact that this is another US war based on lies, and in flagrant breach of international law. US warplanes have carried out more than 160 air strikes inside Iraq after being invited to do so by its puppet regime in Baghdad, and its aircraft and drones have already carried out reconnaissance inside Syria. Washington has arrogated to itself the right to conduct air strikes inside Syria, despite the expressed opposition of the Syrian government.

Speaking on the ABC's "This Week" program last night, US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, declared that the US had the "legal basis" for waging an air war on Syria and that there was "universal support" in the international community for attacking ISIS. In fact, Washington lacks even the fig-leaf of a UN resolution to legitimise its new war. When Obama chairs a special UN Security Council session on Wednesday, he is unlikely to seek a resolution supporting air strikes on Syria, as Russia would veto it.

Power made the absurd assertion that military aggression against Syria was justified because Iraq had requested it. "The Iraqis have appealed to the international community to come to their defence not only in Iraq, but also to go after safe havens in foreign countries. And what they mean of course is Syria. And they're quite explicit about that," she said. Such "requests" could be engineered to justify an aggressive war against any country in the world.

Power insisted that the US had commitments from allies to join the air war on Syria, but declined to name them. Only two countries—France and Australia—have sent war planes. France carried out air strikes on ISIS targets inside Iraq on Friday, but has ruled out doing so in Syria. The Australian government has dispatched fighter jets and hundreds of military personnel to the Middle East, but has given no public commitment to attacking Syria.

While focussing on ISIS atrocities in a bid to gather support for its war, the Obama administration is already laying the groundwork for moving against Assad. US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday again accused the Syrian regime of using chemical weapons against civilians. He seized on a report by the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons, claiming that it "strongly points to Syrian regime culpability" in the use of chlorine

gas. In fact, the report did not assign blame. The Assad government, which has denied any involvement, has far more to lose in carrying out such attacks than the various anti-government militias that are seeking US support.

Likewise, US allies Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which have helped arm and finance right-wing anti-government militias, including ISIS, inside Syria, are now using the Islamic extremists they helped create as a tortured argument for removing Assad. At the UN last Friday, Turkey branded the Syrian regime as a “patron of extremism,” while the Saudi ambassador declared: “ISIL [ISIS] and the Syrian regime are but different sides of the same coin.”

The White House might not be explicitly targeting Assad at present, but other American commentators are. Anthony Cordesman, a prominent strategic analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), left no doubt in a comment last Friday that the war “is not a fight directed at Islamic State alone in Syria.” The defeat of ISIS would “leave Syria divided between an Assad regime that has managed to create even more casualties, human suffering and repression than the Islamic State... and some warring rebel faction in the East.”

Other figures in the US foreign policy and military establishment were even more open. Speaking on CBS, former deputy CIA director Mike Morell declared:

“Assad is the key problem here, supported by Iran and supported by Russia. I would support going after him and his leadership team aggressively. But I don’t want to do it in a way that degrades the Syrian military, the Syrian security service, and the Syrian intelligence service because they need to be able to bring stability to that country when Assad goes.”

Morell’s comments underscore the fact that the renewed regime-change operation against Assad is also aimed against its backers—Iran and Russia. The Obama administration shelved its plans for an aerial blitzkrieg against Syria last September in the face of widespread public opposition, disagreements in ruling circles and Russia’s opposition to the war. In the aftermath, the US, in league with Germany, engineered the fascist-led coup in Ukraine in February and a confrontation with Russia, in order to integrate Eastern Europe further into the NATO alliance and weaken Moscow.

Now the Obama administration has launched a new war in the Middle East aimed at removing Russia’s only regional ally and consolidating its own hegemony. Such a conflict threatens to embroil not just Syria and Iraq but the wider region and to drag in other powers, such as Russia, whose interests are under threat. Moreover, the war will require a far greater US military commitment, despite Obama’s denials that American troops will be involved in combat.

Central to Cordesman’s comment was the need to put US troops on the frontline as “advisers and enablers” of Iraqi forces and anti-Assad militias in Syria. While not currently advocating the use of “major combat units,” he insisted that it would require “a limited number of US ‘boots on the ground’ that will effectively be in combat to make the difference.” The “limited number” would “almost certainly need [to be] something more than the 1,400-odd US troops now assigned to these missions.”

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