

The Israeli strikes on Syria

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Israel's bombing of Damascus International Airport Thursday night and Syrian army targets across Damascus yesterday morning are unprovoked and illegal acts of war, abetted by Washington and its European allies as part of their escalating campaign against Syria.

Russian media reported that 300 Syrian soldiers had been killed and hundreds more wounded in Sunday's attacks alone.

Israeli forces effectively acted as air support for US-backed Islamist opposition militias around Damascus. The opposition Damascus Military Council issued a statement shortly after the bombings Sunday calling on its fighters to put aside their differences and mount focused attacks on Syrian troops.

The attacks come amid a debate in Washington over how the Obama administration should escalate its war in Syria, given the failure of its proxy forces to topple the Syrian regime. The *New York Times* on Sunday described this as "the most urgent foreign policy issue of [Obama's] second term."

The methods being considered testify to the politically criminal character of the undertaking. They include either giving more weapons to the US-backed opposition, which is dominated by the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front, or initiating outright US hostilities. The latter option includes launching US attacks on Syrian aircraft and air defenses to set up a "no-fly zone" inside the country, or invading Syria with US troops based in Jordan or Turkey.

There is every indication that the Israeli strikes were a trial run for possible US air strikes on Syria. Though US and European officials have reportedly discussed launching attacks to start a no-fly zone, Washington has until now refrained from organizing them out of concern over Syria's air defense systems.

Speaking on NBC News's "Meet the Press," US Senator Patrick Leahy (Democrat of Vermont) said the Israeli strikes were carried out with US-supplied F-16s, and that they proved the "Russian-supplied air defense systems are not as good as were said." On the same program, NBC correspondent Andrea Mitchell said that after the Israeli attacks, a no-fly zone in Syria seemed more likely.

The Obama administration rapidly affixed its seal of approval on the Israeli strikes. US officials asserted without proof that the Thursday night strike targeted a shipment of Iranian missiles to the Lebanese Shiite organization Hezbollah, an ally of the Shiite-led regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. US-backed Syrian opposition sources said the massive explosions that shook Damascus Sunday morning were strikes aimed at Syrian army bases and the Jamraya military research facility, which allegedly develops chemical weapons.

From Costa Rica, where he was traveling on a three-day Latin American tour, Obama said: "The Israelis justifiably have to guard against the transfer of advanced weaponry to terrorist organizations like Hezbollah... We coordinate closely with the Israelis, recognizing they are very close to Syria, they are very close to Lebanon."

Like the falsehoods used to justify the US invasion of Iraq, the rationalizations for war against Syria presented to the public are a mixture of unsubstantiated allegations and outright lies. Claims that there is evidence that Assad has used chemical weapons—based on allegations that opposition fighters have found or been poisoned by sarin nerve gas—are false. As one British official confessed yesterday, "It's still completely unclear who used the stuff, in what quantities, and to what effect."

The US reaction to the Israeli strikes do make one thing clear, however: after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Washington is moving to launch a new, large-scale imperialist war, this time against Syria. The consequences of launching such a war of aggression will be, if anything, even greater than the war in Iraq.

Already, the current US proxy war in Syria has set the Middle East aflame. Aimed at isolating and intimidating Syria's main regional ally, oil-rich Iran, it is dragging Hezbollah into the fighting and leading to an outbreak of civil war in Iraq, where Sunni sectarian forces tied to Al Nusra are fighting the Shiite-led government.

By escalating the war in Syria, Washington threatens to unleash a broad regional war that could—if Assad allies China or Russia became involved—trigger a global conflagration.

The US war drive against Syria, carried out ten years after the invasion of Iraq, testifies to the bankruptcy of American democracy. Again, Washington is moving to launch a war in pursuit of its imperialist interests, showing utter contempt for the overwhelming popular opposition to such a war both in the United States and the Middle East. Polls show that 62 percent of Americans are opposed to further arms for the Islamist opposition; similar and even greater majorities in Middle Eastern countries oppose the US proxy war.

The Israeli strikes also put paid to the lies of supporters of the Syrian opposition, such as Gilbert Achcar of the pseudo-left United Secretariat, who recently dismissed criticism of imperialist involvement in the Syrian war as a "kind of conspiracy theory." Since it supported the 2011 NATO war in Libya to remove Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the pseudo-left fraternity has stepped up its activity as propagandists for imperialist wars for regime-change, waged in alliance with right-wing sectarian elements and reactionary regional powers.

Syria has been in Washington's crosshairs for more than a decade, due to its ties to Iran and forces like Hezbollah. With the current war, the United States seeks to set up a protectorate in Syria that will be completely subservient to US policy.

There is virtually no popular support for a new Middle East war in the United States, where the same ruling elite that is waging war abroad is engaged in a ruthless assault on the working class at home. The drive to war in Syria is creating the conditions for an explosive conflict between antiwar sentiment based in the working class and the ever more reckless plans for military plunder of the ruling elite.

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