

The US' Unauthorised Air Strikes in Syria: Against or Favouring Wahhabism and the Islamic State?

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Since the night of September 22/23, US fighter planes have been carrying out strikes with missiles and drones against targets in and around Raqqa, the city in the Northern part of Syria where are located the headquarters of ISIS' self-proclaimed 'Islamic state'. Four of the US's Middle Eastern allies are known to be taking part in these aerial strikes. They signify not just an extension in the warfare the US had previously launched against ISIS positions in Northern Iraq, but herald a decisive break with President Obama's past efforts to wind down and bring to an end the US's involvement in Middle Eastern wars. Once again, as when the US had started its aggression for the overthrow of the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussain (2003), – the current air strikes are clearly illegitimate.

They have neither been authorized by the Syrian government, nor by the UN's Security Council. Although the start of the bombardments inside Syria was preceded by efforts to craft a broad international coalition – at meetings held in Great Britain (NATO), in France and in Saudi Arabia – some of the US's European allies have expressly stated that the bombardments of Syrian targets lack a legal basis. Meanwhile, leading spokespersons of the US's Military Industrial Complex, such as army chief Dempsey and Defense Secretary Hagel, have speculated on an another imperial ground war, aimed at dislodging ISIS from Syria and Iraq.

To bring out the fact that the US's war on ISIS is controversial from the beginning, it is useful to look at the nature of Middle Eastern governments that have committed support to the US. Towards recruiting participants for its war plans, gaining logistical support and financial backing, the US in the first part of September held a meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where 10 countries took part. In an editorial published in the US's most respectable daily on the very day the air strikes over Syria started, the coalition resulting from this Saudi meeting was described as 'the unlikeliest of coalitions!' This in view of the huge funding and other backing ISIS has been receiving from countries that joined the same Saudi meeting.

Yet only a few months back one had a hard time tracing reliable data in Western media or at internet on the history of ISIS' funding. Some researchers of US think tanks such as the Brookings Institution were quoted as stating that ISIS has been mobilizing support from Gulf states for years. Only recently has the world's mainstream press woken up to the fact that Wahhabi clerics and other backers have been voicing pro-ISIS propaganda on t.v. channels in Qatar, and that the Saudi and Kuwaiti government have not hindered, but allowed ISIS-sympathizers to publicly canvass for donors. Worse – Turkey, Syria's neighbor, has been facilitating oil exports from areas ISIS controls. Indeed, one wonders for how long Western intelligence agents active in the Middle East have been asleep.

US officials, pressed by these media reports, now argue that Gulf state governments should curb any funding of ISIS from their territories. But is the matter merely one of a lax attitude by Gulf states towards Sunni extremism? How come this issue is being addressed only now, whereas the rise of ISIS and other new 'al-Qaida'-type forces started way back in the middle of the previous decade, when US forces were battling against Sunni extremist groups in the context of their Iraq occupation? The point is of course that cooperation with Wahhabism, Sunni fundamentalism's leading current, has been built into the very strategy which the hegemonic Western powers - , first Great Britain, then the US - have been pursuing for long.

The UK did so from well before the founding of Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi kingdom (1932). Further, Western allies such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Gulf states may finally been seen to distance themselves from ISIS, - but the reality is that the ideology and practices of these countries' rulers and their Wahhabi clergy closely resemble those of ISIS's top leadership! Just as in ISIS' 'Caliphate', people who don't conform to the country's strict laws are regularly beheaded in Saudi Arabia. Just as in areas 'liberated' by ISIS in Iraq, numerous Sufi shrines have been demolished here in the past. Saudi rulers have pledged to the US that they will help train fighters against ISIS, and have proposed that Saudi clerics inculcate these combatants with proper Islamic views. Yet is there any sharp line of demarcation between Saudi Wahhabism and ISIS's extremism?

Clearly, after over a decade of unsuccessful efforts to combat international 'terrorism', US foreign policy is enmeshed in a web of self-inflicted internal contradictions. But then there may be other, hard reasons explaining the US decision to forge an alliance with cousins of ISIS's Sunni extremism. Here Qatar is probably the most telling example right now. Though Qatar's rulers profess their own variety of Wahhabism and have been enthusiastic supporters of Sunni fundamentalist forces operating throughout the Middle East for years, - the tiny Gulf state's air base Al Udeid hosts the regional headquarters of CENTCOM, the command centre of US military personnel and hardware in the Middle East. Given the controversy over Qatar's role in helping ISIS get funding from people who have amassed oil wealth, - its rulers have now been told to keep a low profile and tone down their international role. Yet no incriminating revelations by US think tanks or press reports prevent the US from maintaining the closest possible arms' trade-ties with the government of Qatar. In the middle of July last, US officials announced that negotiations had been concluded towards the sale of Patriot missiles, Apache helicopters, and other weapons, valued at 11 Billion US Dollars! And this deal was stated to be the 'very biggest' arms' trade-deal of the US in 2014.

Some six years back, Obama was elected the US's President by the American people on an anti-war ticket. Yet being put under huge pressure from the side of the US's transatlanticized Military Industrial Complex, he has launched air strikes that are causing massive devastations and further disruption of life in both Syria and Iraq. Just a year ago, in September of 2013, Obama felt compelled to call off air strikes planned against Syria's government of Assad. The evidence over the use of chemical weapons was shaky, and Russia mediated a sensible compromise.

This time round, the relentless, nightly aerial bombardments are ostensible directed against Assad's jihadi opponents, meaning the barrel of Obama's gun is now pointing in reverse direction. Surely, the current air strikes were preceded by a publicity offensive that was well orchestrated, and a significant part of the public in the West believes the strikes are justified. Yet as the above story on the new war alliance the US has crafted with Arab states indicates, - by no stretch of imagination can it be argued that the current war systematically

aims at weakening the international influence of intolerant forms of Islam. Already, critics argue that the air war only threatens to prolong, nay vastly increase the suffering of people all over the Middle East. As did the wars initiated in 2001 and 2003, respectively against the Taliban in Afghanistan and against Saddam's Iraq. The UN should immediately take the US to task, demand it halt its unjust war waged with intolerant Wahhabi regimes, and take its own responsibility.

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