US deploys troops to Jordan, prepares to invade Syria

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19 April 2013

In testimony before the US Senate Armed Forces Committee on Wednesday, top US defense officials announced that they are deploying 200 troops of the 1st Armored Division to Jordan. They will establish headquarters near the Syrian-Jordanian border and plan for a rapid build-up, involving 20,000 or more US troops, awaiting orders from the White House to invade Syria.

A US invasion force would reportedly include Special Forces troops and regular units preparing for operations inside Syria, as well as air defense units guarding against possible retaliatory Syrian air strikes on Jordan.

US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told the Senate committee that these deployments are part of "robust military planning for a range of contingencies," carried out by the United States and its European and Middle Eastern allies.

At the same time, Washington is carrying out an international diplomatic offensive setting the stage for war with the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad. The topic of US military operations against Syria will reportedly be on the agenda of US Secretary of State John Kerry's discussions in Turkey this weekend, of General Martin Dempsey's talks with Chinese officials next week, and of Hagel's upcoming talks with military officials in Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates.

As US officials admitted, invading Syria would likely involve the United States in a regional war throughout the Middle East. Hagel said that a US intervention in Syria "could have the unintended consequence of bringing the United States into a broader regional conflict or proxy war." He noted that this "could embroil the US in a significant, lengthy, and uncertain military commitment."

He detailed the streams of cash Washington is pouring into the anti-Assad opposition, including $117 million for "communications and medical equipment" as well as undisclosed US State Department and US Agency for International Development funding. Hagel explained, "The goal is to strengthen those opposition groups that share the international community's vision for Syria's future and minimize the influence of extremists."

Hagel was apparently referring to Washington's fears that ultra-right Islamist terrorist groups active in the opposition and funded by the United States' Middle Eastern allies could take over Syria, should the Assad regime collapse. The Al Nusra Front, the military spearhead of the US-backed opposition in Syria, recently swore loyalty to Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. (See "Syrian opposition militia declares allegiance to Al Qaeda")

Though the US has been fighting a proxy war with Syria since 2011, Hagel's comments were the first public confirmation that the Obama administration is preparing a direct US invasion of Syria. Launching such a neo-colonial war would be a historic crime against the population of the Middle East on the scale of the Bush administration's unprovoked invasion of Iraq.

That such a war is being planned 10 years after the unpopular US war in nearby Iraq—which cost over a million Iraqi lives, tens of thousands of US casualties, and trillions of dollars—is a devastating exposure of the decay of American democracy.

The Obama administration and the Democratic Party, having come to power in 2008 with cynical and false appeals to popular opposition to the Iraq war, is pursuing similar policies, with total contempt for popular opposition to war in the US and Middle Eastern

population.

In pursuing regime change in Syria, US imperialism is seeking to impose its hegemony on the entire Middle East. Besides Syria, it is targeting and trying to isolate Syria's main regional ally, oil-rich Iran, which has emerged as the strongest regional power in the Persian Gulf. It also hopes that by eliminating Assad, it will cut off the flow of arms and money to forces and groups in Lebanon and the Occupied Territories opposed to Israel.

The Obama administration's official justifications for the war—that war is necessary to secure Syria's chemical weapons, or to restrain terrorist forces operating inside the US-backed opposition but that are somehow opposed by Washington—are absurd lies. They are contradicted even by the testimony of US officials.

Speaking in a separate meeting of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Kerry made clear that Washington is working very closely with the countries that are funding Al Qaeda-linked forces in Syria. He said, "The United States policy right now is that we are not providing lethal aid, but we are coordinating very, very closely with those who are."

As for Syria's chemical weapons, General Dempsey told the Senate committee that he was not confident that a US invasion of Syria would secure them, as the Assad regime has been moving them to prevent them from falling into the hands of hostile, Al Qaeda-linked fighters. Dempsey explained, "They have been moving [the stockpiles], and the number of sites is quite numerous."

Dempsey indicated that he was not sure that the US can "clearly identify the right people" to support inside the Islamist-dominated Syrian opposition. He added, "The introduction of military power right now certainly has the possibility of making the situation worse."

The Senate Armed Forces Committee chairman, Democratic Senator Carl Levin, criticized Hagel and Dempsey's testimony for not threatening Assad strongly enough. He told reporters that after the hearing, he had asked Hagel and Dempsey if they wanted to send a "tough message" to Assad, adding: "Their answer is yes. That's not what came out in their testimony. We didn't hear it."

Levin recently co-wrote a letter with Republican Senator John McCain to Obama, calling on him to establish a "safe zone" for US-backed opposition fighters in Syria. The letter stated that "the time has come to intensify the military pressure on Assad."

On Wednesday, the anniversary of Syria's independence from French colonial rule, Assad gave a televised address denouncing the US-led war in Syria. While Assad's reactionary regime is no friend of the working class—having imposed free-market policies in Syria and repeatedly made deals with US imperialism to crush opposition to Israel—Assad hit the nail on the head when describing the imperialist forces arrayed against him. They are waging a military campaign to re-impose colonial shackles on the Middle East.

He said, "The truth is, what is happening is a war. It is not security problems. It is a war in every sense of the word. There are big powers, especially Western powers, who historically never accepted the idea of other nations having their independence. They want those nations to submit to them."

Asked about other Middle Eastern countries' role in stoking the war on Syria, he said: "We mustn't blame those countries, because they're not independent. The decision is made by foreign countries."

Assad tartly dismissed claims by the US and its European allies that they are waging "humanitarian" war in Syria, noting: "We saw their humanitarian intervention in Iraq, in Libya, and now we see it in Syria."