

Obama prepares to escalate war in the Middle East

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President Obama will use a nationwide television address Wednesday night to argue for a major escalation of the US military intervention in the Middle East, according to an interview broadcast Sunday morning.

The immediate target of the escalation is the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as ISIL, which has overrun much of western and northern Iraq, threatening the US-backed puppet regime in Baghdad.

Speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press" program, Obama began by answering interviewer Chuck Todd's question, likely rehearsed in advance, "Are you preparing the country to go back to war?"

Obama's response was a qualified "yes." He said, "I'm preparing the country to make sure that we deal with a threat from ISIL. Keep in mind that this is something that we know how to do. We've been dealing with terrorist threats for quite some time."

He cited the attacks on Al Qaeda targets in Pakistan's tribal area, conducted with drone-fired missiles that have taken the lives of hundreds of civilians, as well as last week's attack in Somalia that killed the top leader of the Islamist Al-Shabaab organization.

As Todd noted, Obama has scheduled the nationally televised address on the eve of the 13th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, which killed nearly 3,000 people in New York and Washington.

Obama previewed the alarmist and warmongering character of this speech by telling the NBC interviewer that compared to Al Qaeda, "ISIL poses a broader threat because of its territorial ambitions in Iraq and Syria."

Given that the Bush administration used the 9/11 attacks as the pretext for invading and occupying Afghanistan, invading and occupying Iraq, and launching a frontal assault on democratic rights within

the United States, the declaration that ISIL "poses a broader threat" has the most ominous implications.

Whatever specific military plans Obama chooses to discuss Wednesday—the speech will likely conceal more than it reveals—the Pentagon is already drawing up options for military actions in both Iraq and Syria, including not only bombing and missile strikes, but also the mobilization of US ground troops.

In a further extension of the new US role in Iraq, US warplanes struck targets in the western province of Anbar Friday and Saturday for the first time since the US withdrawal in 2011. Bombers hit ISIS positions near the Haditha dam on the Euphrates River, which is still controlled by the Iraqi Army but under attack from Sunni fighters.

Obama dropped a further hint of the direction in US policy, telling "Meet the Press" that for the last several months US operations have been preparatory and defensive, including surveillance of ISIS forces and blunting ISIS offensives in northern Iraq. "The next phase is now to start going on some offense," he said.

Obama added that he would meet with congressional leaders on Tuesday and give his television address the following day "to describe what our game plan's going to be going forward."

Obama claimed, "(T)his is not going to be an announcement about US ground troops. This is not the equivalent of the Iraq war."

Obama is following the example of the Bush administration in lying to the American people. Bush lied about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and alleged ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. Obama is lying about the scale of the renewed American military intervention.

Obama is pledging "no boots on the ground" even as US Special Operations forces and combat "advisers"

have already been deployed in the hundreds, and the total US military force in Iraq has already topped 1,100.

Obama admitted there was no evidence of any threat to the American people from ISIS, but he employed the same type of scare tactics made notorious by Bush and Cheney. He called the Islamist group “an organization that, if allowed to control significant amounts of territory, to amass more resources, more arms to attract more foreign fighters, including from areas like Europe, who have Europeans who have visas and then can travel to the United States unimpeded, that over time, that can be a serious threat to the homeland.”

While declaring that he would consult with Congress and demand funding for stepped-up military operations in the Middle East, Obama denied that he needed congressional approval for his actions. “I’m confident that I have the authorization that I need to protect the American people.”

He said his Wednesday night television address “will allow Congress, I think, to understand very clearly and very specifically what it is that we are doing, but also what we’re not doing. We’re not looking at sending in 100,000 American troops.”

What the White House and Pentagon evidently hope to do is combine US bombing of ISIS with ground attacks by Iraqi Army and Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Iraq, while US-backed “rebel” forces such as the Free Syrian Army are built up to provide a counterweight to ISIS in Syria. When and how the US military assumes a direct role in Syria still remains to be determined.

A major concern of the White House is that any strikes against ISIS in Syria might indirectly aid the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Obama reiterated in his “Meet the Press” interview that the US goal in Syria remains the removal of Assad, whose main allies are Iran and Russia.

Obama hailed the formation of a ten-nation US-led “coalition” of imperialist powers to back the renewed intervention in Iraq. The first ground troops produced by this coalition came in the form of a small group of “military advisers” supplied by Canada, while Australia, Britain and France are providing air support.

The administration continues to be under pressure from its right-wing opponents in the Republican Party, who are demanding a much quicker escalation, including immediate attacks on ISIS targets in Syria.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said he

would participate in the White House meeting Tuesday, calling on Obama to present plans for military action in both Iraq and Syria.

In an interview with the *Times of London*, former Republican Secretary of State Henry Kissinger urged Obama to “launch an all-out attack” on ISIS, saying that air strikes should “not make any distinction between Syria and Iraq.” He added, “There can’t be any debate any more about fighting them.”

The 91-year-old Kissinger, architect of countless war crimes in Vietnam, as well as such atrocities as the 1973 CIA-backed military coup in Chile, has been a leading figure among strategists for US imperialism for more than half a century. His most recent book, *World Order*, was favorably reviewed in Sunday’s *Washington Post* by none other than Hillary Clinton, who wrote, “Kissinger is a friend, and I relied on his counsel when I served as secretary of state.”



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