

Obama administration asserts unlimited powers for new war in Iraq, Syria

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The Obama administration is moving rapidly to extend the US bombing campaign into Syria, while expanding the training and arming of US-backed “rebels” seeking to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad.

The escalation of military operations follows Obama’s speech on Wednesday, in which he used the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as a pretext for launching a new war throughout the oil-rich Middle East.

On Friday, White House and Pentagon officials declared that the US was at “war” with ISIS, a rhetorical change from statements a day earlier that what was planned was not a war but an extended “counter-terrorism” operation. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Friday, “In the same way that we are at war with Al Qaeda and its affiliates around the globe, we are at war with ISIL.”

The shift in language underscored the far-reaching scale of the war plans being developed behind the backs of the American people by White House and Pentagon officials. Earnest said that surveillance missions over Syria that began last month had already mapped out targets for American bombs. “These targets have been exposed because of the president’s early decision to ramp up our intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets that were operating in the region,” he said.

There are also discussions about the introduction of ground troops, including Special Operations forces to coordinate a bombing campaign in Syria. While Obama on Wednesday claimed the military action would not involve additional combat troops, Secretary of State John Kerry made clear that this pledge would be quickly scrapped if there are “very, very dramatic changes.” Already, some 1,500 US troops are in Iraq,

in addition to private contractors.

Political leaders of both parties have declared their support for a resolution, to be passed separately or as part of a larger spending bill, to provide \$500 million for the arming of Syrian “rebels.” The training of these forces is to be coordinated by Saudi Arabia, which has been heavily involved in CIA operations over the past several years to fund Islamist forces in Syria, including ISIS, waging war against Assad.

“We ought to give the president what he’s asking for,” said House Speaker John Boehner, a Republican, on Thursday, adding that many in Congress felt that “a lot more needs to be done.” Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat, announced that the funding proposal would likely pass within a week.

While the Obama administration is seeking funding authorization for arming Syrian rebels, it is insisting that it does not need any additional authorization for the war itself, including the extension of bombings in Iraq, Syria and beyond. In doing so, it is asserting its claim that the president has unlimited powers to declare and wage war, in direct violation of the US Constitution and the War Powers Act of 1973.

The War Powers Act, passed toward the end of the Vietnam War, requires that the president obtain congressional authorization within 60 days of “hostilities.” It stipulates that if this authorization is not obtained, US forces must be withdrawn within 30 days.

In a transparently pseudo-legal argument, the White House is claiming that this authorization is not needed because the war ostensibly targeting ISIS falls within the framework of the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed thirteen years ago in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. White House spokesman Earnest said Thursday that the president believes the AUMF “continues to apply to

this terrorist organization that is operating in Iraq and Syria.”

The AUMF, which has been cited to justify endless war and assaults on democratic rights under both Bush and Obama, refers only to “nations, organizations, or persons [the president] determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided” the September 11 attacks. This clearly does not apply to ISIS, which was formed long after these attacks were carried out.

In any case, the Obama administration has previously asserted that the AUMF is not necessary for launching war in any part of the world. In May, Defense Department General Counsel Stephen Preston argued that the AUMF did not give the president any war-making powers that he did not already have from the Constitution, a declaration of unlimited executive power.

In an opinion piece published in the *New York Times* on Friday, Yale law professor Bruce Ackerman wrote that the moves by the Obama administration in relation to Iraq and Syria “mark a decisive break in the American constitutional tradition. Nothing attempted by his predecessor, George W. Bush, remotely compares in imperial hubris.”

Ackerman noted that the invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) were preceded by votes in Congress. “In contrast,” he wrote, “the Obama administration has not even published a legal opinion attempting to justify the president’s assertion of unilateral war-making authority. This is because no serious opinion can be written.”

When it led the campaign to overthrow Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the White House claimed that it did not need authorization from Congress because the operation did not rise to the level of “hostilities” as described in the War Powers Act. Even this specious argument has been dispensed with in relation to the present escalation.

The launching of a new war in the Middle East in flagrant violation of the Constitution underscores the connection between permanent war abroad and the destruction of democratic rights within the United States. Foreign policy is worked out behind the scenes by a cabal of intelligence agents and political and military officials, along with their associated think tanks, and sold to the population on the basis of lies.



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