

US House approves Obama plan for military intervention in Syria

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The US House of Representatives voted Wednesday afternoon to approve the Obama administration's plan to build up Syrian "rebel" forces as part of a greater US military intervention in the Middle East. The bipartisan approval came by a margin of 273-156, with majorities of both Republicans (159-71) and Democrats (114-85) supporting the measure.

The nominal target is the Islamic fundamentalist group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), which now controls much of eastern Syria and western Iraq. ISIS has carried out atrocities against religious minorities in Iraq and executed three Western hostages, two of them American journalists.

But the real purpose of the US intervention is to overthrow the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria and establish a pro-US regime in Damascus, just as the invasion and conquest of Iraq—also in the guise of fighting "terrorism"—produced an American puppet government in Baghdad.

The measure approving US training of Syrian opposition forces came in the form of an amendment to a bill known as a "continuing resolution," which authorizes funding for all federal government operations from October 1, when the current fiscal year begins, through December 11.

Shortly after approving the amendment, the House passed the continuing resolution by a larger margin, 319-108. The bill goes to the Senate, which is expected to pass it easily Thursday, approving the Syria training program as part of the continuing resolution rather than taking a separate vote.

Those voting for the Syrian intervention included the entire leadership of the Republican and Democratic parties in the House: Speaker John Boehner, Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Majority Whip Steve Scalise, and Minority Whip Steny Hoyer.

A raft of prominent liberal Democrats voted "yes," including Xavier Becerra of California, John Conyers of Michigan, Jan Schakowsky of Illinois, and Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida, chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

The seven congressmen who are candidates for US Senate seats in the November election all voted for the bill, demonstrating that support for military intervention overseas is a requirement for promotion to higher office within both corporate-controlled parties. These included five Republicans and two Democrats, Gary Peters of Michigan and Bruce Braley of Iowa.

A majority of those who voted against the bill, including most of the Republicans and many Democrats, wanted a more sweeping and aggressive approach to ISIS, authorizing direct US military strikes in Syria and even the use of ground troops. Only a few dozen representatives claimed to oppose any form of military escalation in Iraq and Syria.

Numerous comments in the House debate indicated that the congressmen were well aware that the measure could open the way to a US war against the Assad regime. Carolyn Maloney of New York said she opposed the measure because it "could turn into a war on three fronts: fighting ISIS in Iraq, fighting ISIS in Syria and potentially Assad in Syria."

As for the nature of the "rebels" that the US government is now publicly committed to arming and training, Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, speaking at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing Wednesday, described meeting US-backed fighters who openly declared their willingness to use chemical weapons against the Syrian army.

While the subject was quickly swept under the rug by Secretary of State John Kerry, the principal administration official at the hearing, Gillibrand was raising a touchy issue: ISIS is itself a creation of previous US military

interventions, not merely because it arose as a byproduct of the 2003 US invasion and occupation of Iraq, but because many ISIS fighters were trained and armed by the CIA or US allies Qatar and Saudi Arabia as part of their joint efforts to subvert and overthrow the Assad regime since 2011.

The Obama administration has already outlined one scenario in which the war it has launched against ISIS could be transformed into a war with Assad. The Associated Press reported Monday, citing “senior Obama administration officials,” that the US would attack Syrian air defenses if they fired on US warplanes bombing ISIS targets. The AP story elaborated on a report that first appeared Sunday in the *New York Times*, which suggested that such airstrikes could lead to the overthrow of Assad.

Asked Monday about these reports, White House spokesman Josh Earnest effectively confirmed them. He said the Pentagon had “rules of engagement that are related to any military orders the president directs,” adding, “It won’t surprise you to know that there are contingencies related to self-defense when it comes to these sorts of rules of engagement.”

Only hours before the House vote to authorize US intervention in the Syrian civil war, President Obama visited the US Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, which oversees all US military operations in the Middle East. He received a briefing on recent airstrikes in Iraq from Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, commander of Central Command, and other top military and intelligence officials.

Obama also addressed an audience of military personnel, giving a 15-minute speech on the war with ISIS, while claiming it would not develop into a full-scale ground war on the scale of Iraq and Afghanistan. The US role would be limited to airstrikes and advising Iraqi and Kurdish ground forces, he said.

More significant than this assurance, however, was Obama’s declaration, in the most sweeping terms since he entered the White House in 2009, of American world domination. “Our Armed Forces are unparalleled and unique,” he said. “I want you to know, as I stand here with you today, I’m as confident as I have ever been that this century, just like the last century, will be led by America. It will be and is an American century.”

Obama went on to insist that while “only 1 percent of Americans may wear the uniform and shoulder the weight of special responsibilities that you do... 100 percent of Americans need to support you and your families—100 percent.”

Obama’s remarks on the use of ground troops appeared to be an effort to rebut suggestions by his own military commanders that a wider ground war was in the offing. General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said as much in well-publicized testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee Tuesday. Dempsey also revealed that General Austin had already sought to use US soldiers as ground spotters for air strikes around Mosul Dam in Iraq, although the Pentagon had denied permission.

Another top officer, Army Chief of Staff Raymond Odierno, told journalists Wednesday at a press briefing in Wiesbaden, Germany, that airstrikes had halted the advance of ISIS in Iraq but wouldn’t be an “end-all” to the conflict. “You’ve got to have ground forces that are capable of going after them and rooting them out,” he said, without specifying where those ground forces would come from.

Meanwhile, the well-connected *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius, a frequent mouthpiece for high-level leaks from the military-intelligence apparatus, wrote a commentary Wednesday under the headline, “U.S. boots are already on the ground against the Islamic State.” He cited Title 50 of the US Code, regulating the activities of the CIA, which allows the president to send US Special Operations forces on military actions under CIA direction, as in the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

“Let’s be honest,” Ignatius wrote. “US boots are already on the ground, and more are coming. The question is whether Obama will decide to say so publicly, or remain in his preferred role as covert commander in chief.”

Meanwhile, within Iraq, US military operations intensified with the first bombing raids around Baghdad. US warplanes hit targets in Sunni towns southwest of the capital city Monday and Tuesday. The attacks were coordinated with an Iraqi Army offensive that began at dawn Wednesday, with ground forces striking westward in Anbar province, including artillery and mortar barrages of its capital Ramadi and the cities of Fallujah and Haditha.



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