

US launches air strikes inside Syria

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The US began a series of devastating and ongoing air strikes inside Syria early Tuesday, bombing the town of Raqqa and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) targets along the country's border with Iraq. The attacks on ISIS are the pretext for stepping up the US-backed regime-change operation against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and mark the expansion of a reckless and illegal war that will have catastrophic consequences for the Middle East and beyond.

The new air war was announced in a brief statement by the Pentagon press secretary, Rear Admiral John Kirby, who stated that "US military and partner nation forces are undertaking military action against ISIL [ISIS] terrorists in Syria using a mix of fighter, bomber and Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles." Indifferent to public opinion, President Obama issued no statement and made no comment.

Details provided by unnamed US officials make clear that the air campaign inside Syria goes far beyond the scope of the air strikes in Iraq over the past six weeks. At least 20 targets have been hit within the first hours, using cruise missiles launched from US navy ships and precision-guided bombs fired from warplanes and drones. The strikes reportedly targeted ISIS command centres, weapons supplies, depots, barracks and buildings.

US warplanes were reportedly joined by those from at least four Arab countries—US allies Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Washington's claims to have broad support for its new war are belied by the fact that it is allied with autocratic Middle Eastern monarchies that are among the most despotic in the world.

The air strikes are an illegal act of war against a country that has never posed a threat to the United States. The Obama administration launched the bombing without even the fig leaf of a UN Security Council resolution and against the expressed opposition

of the Syrian government, which offered to collaborate with Washington in fighting ISIS. Once again, the US is engaged in an unprovoked war of aggression—the chief charge on which German Nazi leaders were tried and convicted at the post-World War II trials in Nuremberg.

Even if one takes US justifications at face value, the reactionary ISIS Islamists are a direct product of US imperialism's previous criminal wars, including the CIA's covert war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and regime-change operations in Libya and Syria from 2011. In fact, the very allies that joined in today's bombing—Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States—have been funding, training and arming ISIS and other Islamist militias inside Syria for the past three years to topple Assad.

None of Washington's explanations and excuses has any credibility. Saudi Arabia and the Middle Eastern allies have joined the war against Syria precisely because the US objective is not the destruction of ISIS, but the toppling of the Assad regime—Iran's main ally in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, which regards Iran as its arch-rival, was bitterly critical of the Obama administration when it called off its planned air war against Syria a year ago at the last moment.

Commenting in the *New York Times* about the air strikes in Syria, an administration official made clear that the Syrian regime would not be allowed to capitalise on the initial attacks on ISIS-held areas. "We don't plan to make it easy for Assad to reclaim territory," he said, without revealing the methods that would be used. Having begun the bombardment of Syria, the US is quite capable of fabricating an incident as the pretext for turning the air war against the Syrian government and military.

It is no accident that in the past week the Obama administration has revived accusations that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons against civilian

populations. Despite the fact that Syria has dismantled its chemical weapons and facilities, US Secretary of State John Kerry now claims, without any substantiation, that it has used chlorine gas against opposition-held villages. A year ago, the US was on the point of bombing Syria on the basis of allegations, later completely discredited, that Assad's government carried out a nerve gas attack on the Damascus suburb of Ghouta.

The Obama administration's claims to be engaged in a humanitarian operation to protect the persecuted minorities in Iraq or Syria are a macabre joke. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 profoundly destabilised the country, resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths, forced millions into exile and stoked bitter sectarian tensions throughout the region. The three-year civil war in Syria, fomented and fuelled by the US and its allies, has produced another humanitarian catastrophe.

The results of the latest military intervention will be no less disastrous. Thousands of civilians will die, millions more will be forced to flee, and what remains of Syria's social and physical infrastructure will be left in ruins.

Nor will that be the end. The war against Syria is the prelude to US military confrontations with Assad's backers—Iran and Russia—and also with China. Driven by its historic economic decline, US imperialism is engaged in a continuous war to shore up its dominance in the energy-rich Middle East, and in every area of the world, setting the stage for a global conflagration.

The Obama administration has initiated the attacks on Syria without a semblance of Congressional authorisation or any explanation to the American people. It is a war being waged on behalf of a financial aristocracy for which US hegemony is essential to its looting operations. The eruption of militarism abroad goes hand in hand with deepening social inequality and the build-up of a police state apparatus to suppress social tensions at home. Essential public services are being gutted while endless resources are lavished on the military and police.

The accelerating pace of imperialist violence is driven by the same crisis of global capitalism that is preparing the ground for revolutionary upheavals. The urgent necessity is the building of a unified anti-war movement of the international working class, based on

the perspective of socialist internationalism, to put an end to the barbaric and outmoded profit system.



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