

US ramps up war in Syria

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As US and allied warplanes continued to strike targets inside Syria, the Obama administration is marshalling support for a war that is more and more explicitly aimed against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, rather than the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

At least eight air strikes targeted towns and villages yesterday in northern and eastern Syria, including a grain silo in the northern town of Manbij. While US Central Command claimed ISIS was using the silo “as a logistics hub and vehicle staging facility,” the pro-Western Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that at least two civilians were killed.

Syrian Observatory director Rami Abdulrahman told Reuters that the air strikes appeared to have killed only civilians, not fighters. “These were the workers at the silos. They provide food for the people,” he said. Based on contacts inside Syria, the organisation estimates the civilian death toll from US-led strikes over the past week at 19.

On Sunday, the US-based Human Rights Watch confirmed the death of at least seven civilians—two women and five children—in the village of Kafr during the first barrage of cruise missiles and air strikes launched by the US and allied Gulf States on September 23.

The battle for the Syrian Kurdish city of Kobani near the northern border with Turkey has become the pretext for the Turkish mobilisation of tanks and troops in preparation for a possible incursion into Syria. An estimated 160,000 Syrian Kurds fled across the border after ISIS laid siege to Kobani over the past week.

The Kurdish militias defending the city, known as People’s Protection Units (YPG), are affiliated with the Turkish-based Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which Turkey has branded as a “terrorist” group and has fought a protracted war to suppress. While Turkey has allowed Syrian Kurds to re-cross into Syria to fight

ISIS, it has blocked Turkish Kurds from doing the same.

The Turkish government is preparing its own military intervention as part of the escalating US-led war. Two motions are expected to be presented to the Turkish parliament today and voted on later this week to authorise the military to cross the border into Syria and Iraq. Agence France Presse reported that Turkey’s top general was due to speak to cabinet today. The Turkish military has deployed at least 15 tanks along the border near Kobani.

The Turkish government has mooted the establishment of a buffer zone inside Syria and also called for a no-fly zone over areas of Syria—an appeal that the Obama administration now declares it is considering. The creation of a no-fly zone is transparently directed against the Assad regime and the Syrian military, the only force inside the country that has war planes.

Over the past three years, Turkey has been a source of support for anti-Assad militias, including ISIS, as well as a transit country for fighters, finance and arms flowing into Syria from other countries. While the Obama administration has called on the Turkish government to close its borders with Syria, it has used its NATO ally for the same supply purposes. The CIA jointly operates a centre inside Turkey, known as the Military Operations Command, through which it has helped arm and support the Western-aligned opposition inside Syria.

Just a week after the first US-led air strikes on Syria, British Prime Minister David Cameron hinted on Sunday that British war planes might have their operations extended from Iraq into Syria. He declared that he had “a lot of sympathy” with the view expressed by former British defence staff chief David Richards who told the *Sunday Times*: “You cannot possibly defeat IS [ISIS] by only tackling them in

Iraq.”

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop also indicated on Sunday that the Australian government, which is poised this week to give the green light for air strikes in Iraq, was considering involvement in the US air war inside Syria. “Should there be a request in relation to Syria,” she said, “we would consider it.” Bishop flatly ruled out any collaboration with the Syrian government, declaring: “We don’t consider that as a legitimate regime.”

The comments by Cameron and Bishop underscore just how quickly the war against ISIS is morphing into a renewal of the regime-change operation against Assad that President Obama shelved just 12 months ago.

In an interview with CBS on Sunday, Obama maintained that by bombing ISIS, Washington had no intention of aiding Assad. He declared: “I recognise the contradiction in a contradictory land and a contradictory circumstance.” However, while dealing with “immediate threats” like ISIS, he insisted: “We are not going to stabilise Syria under the rule of Assad.”

In fact, Assad has been the main target all along. Washington has launched an illegal war of aggression inside Syrian territory and is boosting its training, financing and arming of militias whose sole aim for the past three years has been to overthrow the Syrian government. The US is more than capable of seizing on, or manufacturing, a pretext for turning its air war against the Syrian military and transforming the conflict into the means for installing a puppet regime in Damascus.

The utter cynicism of the US foreign policy was expressed in Obama’s attempt to justify military action by blaming the American intelligence community for having “underestimated” the rise of ISIS. The CIA was not only aware of the strength of ISIS and other reactionary Islamist militias inside the armed Syrian opposition, but directly, or indirectly through its Gulf State allies, helped to finance and arm them as the means for ousting Assad.

The US only turned on ISIS when it crossed the border into Iraq and threatened to unseat Washington’s client regime in Baghdad. Now ISIS serves as a convenient justification for ramping up a war inside Syria that is aimed not only against Assad but also his main backers, Iran and Russia, threatening to trigger a

wider conflagration.



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