

US-Jordan war games prepare wider Mideast conflict

Patrick Martin
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Some ten thousand troops began military exercises in Jordan on Tuesday, in the fifth annual “Eager Lion” war games led by the Pentagon. The drills are in preparation for a greatly expanded military conflict in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East.

A total of nine Arab countries—Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Lebanon, and Iraq—join the US, Britain, France, Italy, Canada, Belgium, Poland, Australia and Pakistan for the exercise.

But the US military will dominate Eager Lion, supplying 5,000 of the 10,000 troops, including headquarters, air, land, sea and special operations forces. During the two-week-long exercise, from May 5 through May 19, there will be more American troops in Jordan than in neighboring Iraq, where President Obama has dispatched some 3,000 troops to train Iraqi forces and conduct special operations warfare and airstrikes against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Maj. Gen. Rick Mattson, Director of Exercises and Training at the US Central Command, said the 2015 version of Eager Lion was the largest military exercise involving US and Jordanian armed forces since the series of drills began in 2011.

The military exercise is focused on counterterrorism, although that term has been stretched to include almost every facet of military operations short of using nuclear weapons. Mattson said, “Everything available is dedicated to the success of the exercise,” including B-52 strategic bombers, which will participate for the first time.

One element of the exercise will be a simulated bombing raid by a new US plane that will take off from the United States and fly directly to Jordan to drop bombs on a desert target.

Jordanian Brigadier General Fhad al-Damin told

reporters the exercises would focus on border security and “combating terrorism,” clearly linking the war games to the ongoing conflict with ISIS, the fundamentalist Islamist group whose forces are just across Jordan’s borders with both Syria and Iraq.

According to a report Monday in the *Christian Science Monitor*, Jordan has stepped up its intervention against ISIS and the Al Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, which recently took control of Nassib, on the border between Jordan and Syria, the last crossing point still in widespread use.

The Jordanian monarchy views the presence of ISIS and al-Nusra along its borders as the main threat to its security and continued rule, and has sought allies among tribal sheiks whose extended families live on both sides of the Syria-Jordan border, a vast and largely desert region.

According to the *Monitor*, “Jordan is reaching out to Syrian tribes and civilians. It’s offering support in their fight to regain towns and villages overrun by IS—a preemptive step to prevent jihadists from threatening Jordan’s borders.” Jordan has offered air support from the US-led coalition that is bombing ISIS targets in both Syria and Iraq.

Perfecting his technique of telling barefaced lies to reporters who know he is lying and take dictation anyway, General Mattson declared, “Eager Lion has nothing to do with what is currently happening in the region,” a reference to ongoing US-led or US-backed military operations in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, the Strait of Hormuz and across North Africa.

A look at the map demonstrates how preposterous that claim is. Jordan is of central importance to the US-led imperialist intervention in the Middle East. It lies just south of Syria and west of Iraq, both key battlefields against ISIS, east of Israel and north of

Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, nearly all the countries joining in Eager Lion are engaged in one or another of the US-led and US-supported military operations throughout the Middle East.

In Iraq, Britain, France, Canada, and Australia are participating either in airstrikes against ISIS or training of Iraqi combat units, or both.

In Syria, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Jordan have joined in US-led airstrikes, mainly against ISIS targets but in a few cases against the al-Nusra Front. On Friday, a US airstrike killed at least 64 civilians in the Syrian Arab village of Bir Mahali.

In Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf sheikdoms and Egypt are all engaged in airstrikes against Houthi rebels who ousted the US-installed president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. There are reports that Saudi and other special forces troops may be operating inside Yemen as well, and that Saudi warplanes have used US-supplied cluster bombs against Yemeni cities.

UAE, Qatari and Egyptian warplanes have struck Islamic fundamentalist militia targets in Libya as well, and the Egyptian military is fighting Islamist rebels among the Bedouin tribes who live in the Sinai Peninsula, near the Israeli-Egyptian border.

Add to this the enormous US military presence in the Persian Gulf, including major bases in Kuwait (Army), Qatar (Air Force) and Bahrain (Navy), as well as a French base in the UAE and US and British bases in Oman, along with regular US Navy patrols of the Strait of Hormuz, separating Iran and Oman.

The Middle East is a powder keg, and American imperialism is the leading arsonist, both in deploying its own military forces and selling vast (and highly profitable) caches of weapons to its client states throughout the region. That list, of course, includes the state of Israel, the most heavily armed in the region, with an estimated stockpile of at least 250 nuclear bombs, along with missiles, warplanes and submarines capable of delivering them.

The opening of the war games in Jordan follows reports in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* that members of the US-led “coalition” against ISIS are pressing for an extension of military operations against the Islamists into other countries, including Libya and the Sinai region of Egypt, as well as unspecified

repressive measures in Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen.

Meanwhile, the US continues to strike targets in Yemen with drone-fired missiles operated from the American military base in Djibouti, just across the Red Sea. Secretary of State John Kerry will visit the base this week, in a sign of the stepped-up concern in the Obama administration over the deteriorating position of US-backed forces in Yemen.

Also, the Egyptian military junta announced Sunday that it had extended by three months the deployment of “some elements of the armed forces” abroad, i.e., in Yemen. The action came a day after President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi visited Saudi Arabia, where he discussed both the war in Yemen and Saudi financial subsidies to the bloodstained military dictatorship in Egypt.



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