

US airdrops arms in Syria as Russia escalates bombing campaign

Bill Van Auken
13 October 2015

Just days after terminating its disastrously failed program to arm and train US-backed “rebels” in Syria, the Pentagon announced Monday that US Air Force C-17 cargo planes escorted by fighter jets airdropped some 50 tons of arms, ammunition and grenades to anti-government forces.

“This successful airdrop provided ammunition to Syrian Arab groups whose leaders were appropriately vetted by the United States,” Pentagon spokesman Colonel Patrick Ryder said in a statement.

The Pentagon failed to disclose the names of the groups led by these “vetted” leaders or the location where the arms were dropped. Media accounts have referred to the Syrian Arab Coalition, a name invented by the Pentagon itself, to describe various militias that it has decided to aid militarily.

An unnamed “senior defense department official” told Fox News, “All the pallets reached friendly forces.” He said that the arms had been taken from stockpiles that had been intended for the “train and equip” program to field a militia force trained and armed by the US military in Turkey and Jordan.

“So now we are more focused on the ‘E’ [equip] part of the T&E [train & equip]” program, the official said.

The earlier program failed spectacularly, with General Lloyd Austin, the commander of US Central Command, admitting to Congress last month that only “four or five” US-trained fighters were on the ground in Syria at the time, and barely 100 more were undergoing training. This was after some \$40 million had been spent out of the \$500 million allocated to the Pentagon for the program.

Within just weeks of Austin’s startling admission, a second group of US-trained and armed rebels was sent back into Syria, where they promptly surrendered their US-supplied vehicles and weapons to Syria’s Al Qaeda

affiliate, the al-Nusra Front.

In what increasingly seems like a policy devised by the criminally insane, Washington is now dumping tons of weapons into a civil war zone where, in all likelihood, they will fall quickly into the hands of forces like al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which the Obama administration claims to be fighting.

The US is engaged in an increasingly desperate attempt to rescue the Syrian adherents of Al Qaeda, a force which the American people have been told for the last 18 years is their most deadly threat, to be countered with endless war and sweeping attacks on democratic rights.

Ten days of a Russian bombing campaign have done far more to drive back these forces than over a year of airstrikes carried out by the US and its so-called coalition, consisting largely of Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni monarchical dictatorships of the Persian Gulf, which are the principal financiers of al-Nusra and ISIS.

Russia has doubled its number of daily airstrikes in Syria. On Monday, the Russian Defense Ministry said it had hit 53 targets including command centers, training camps and fuel and ammunition dumps belonging to ISIS and other “terrorists.”

Washington and its European allies have repeatedly denounced the Russian intervention, claiming that it is focused not on ISIS, but rather on non-ISIS forces opposed to the Moscow-backed Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

They make little or no attempt to identify these alleged non-ISIS targets, however. In large measure this is because the main “rebel” force being struck in these attacks is the Army of Conquest, a collection of Sunni Islamist militias whose strongest component is

the al-Nusra Front.

Russia has launched many of its attacks in northwest Syria in an attempt to reverse the defeats suffered by government forces at the hands of these Al Qaeda-linked elements, particularly in the provinces of Idlib and Hama, and to drive them back from the northern coastal province of Latakia. With its large Alawite population, Latakia is a stronghold of the Assad government.

Washington is in a de facto alliance with al-Nusra and similar elements, which, together with ISIS, represent the most potent anti-government forces in Syria's bloody four-year-old civil war.

Both Washington and Moscow claim to be fighting for the same goals in Syria: the destruction of ISIS and a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

In reality, however, under the cover of these supposedly shared aims, the US and Russia are pursuing diametrically opposed objectives, placing them on a collision course.

The US, in alliance with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Sunni oil sheikdoms, instigated, armed and funded the sectarian civil war in Syria. It is determined to achieve regime change, just as it did in Iraq and Libya. However, while demanding the ouster of Assad and the imposition of a US puppet in his place, Washington does not want to see the complete collapse of the Syrian state and the assumption of power by ISIS, al-Nusra and similar forces that have been doing its dirty work.

Its aim is to weaken the regime to such an extent that it is prepared to capitulate to American demands. To this end, Washington has assured a steady flow of arms and money to the anti-government forces to assure that the war grinds on.

As for ISIS, the Obama administration had no problem with its atrocities as long as they were being carried out inside Syria. It only responded once ISIS columns overran roughly a third of Iraq in the summer of 2014. Since then, it has carried out a remarkably ineffective air campaign against ISIS, which appears aimed at most at rolling back its advances in Iraq, while containing and preserving it as a fighting force inside Syria.

This cynical policy, together with the chaos and carnage unleashed in the region by the previous US imperialist wars in Iraq and Libya, bears principal

responsibility for the deaths of over a quarter of a million Syrians and the turning of millions more into homeless refugees.

Russia, on the other hand, wants to defeat both ISIS and the other Islamist militias like al-Nusra that are often referred to in Western government and media circles as “moderates.” Its position is that a negotiated settlement is possible only once the Assad government is secure. As Russian President Vladimir Putin put it Sunday, Russia's military actions were designed to “stabilize the legitimate authorities and create conditions for finding a political compromise.”

Its objective is to assure that a regime friendly to Russian interests—with or without Assad—remains in power in Syria, which is Moscow's sole ally in the Middle East and the site of its only military base outside of the former Soviet Union, the naval installation at the Mediterranean port of Tartus.

A successful American regime change operation in Syria would cut across definite interests of the Russian state and the ruling class of criminal oligarchs that it represents. These include the likely use of Syria as a new pipeline route to bring gas from Qatar to the European market, thereby undercutting Gazprom, Russia's largest corporation and biggest exporter. Assad's refusal to consider such a route played no small role in Qatar's pouring tens of billions of dollars in arms and funds into the Syrian civil war.

The threat that the increasingly explosive situation in Syria will bring the world's two largest nuclear powers into direct conflict, posing the threat of a third world war, was underscored again Monday with a report that British warplanes had been given the go-ahead to fire air-to-air missiles at Russian jets if threatened.

Britain's defense attaché in Moscow, summoned to the Kremlin for an explanation, denied the report, while reiterating London's opposition to Russia's air war in Syria.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact