Obama orders Special Forces troops into Syria

Bill Van Auken
31 October 2015

The announcement by the Obama White House that up to 50 US Special Forces troops are being deployed on the ground in Syria represents a qualitative escalation of Washington's illegal intervention in the war-ravaged country.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest confirmed the deployment of what he described as the "special operators" at a press conference Friday. Earnest spent most of the conference attempting to deny the obvious: that this latest military escalation stands in direct contradiction to repeated promises made by Obama since 2013, when he pledged in an address to the American people that he would not "put American boots on the ground in Syria."

Earnest claimed that the earlier statements were "related to what we were prepared to do to ensure that our concerns about the Assad regime and the need for regime change were implemented," while the latest escalation was directed against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

This is all nonsense and obfuscation. Washington has intervened over more than four years in Syria with the principal objective of toppling the government of President Bashar al-Assad and imposing a puppet of US interests in his place.

Initially, it waged its campaign for regime change under the banner of "human rights," while the CIA coordinated efforts with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to funnel billions of dollars worth of arms and funding to al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias like ISIS and the al-Nusra Front to foment a bloody sectarian civil war against the government in Damascus.

When ISIS headed eastward from Syria and overran roughly a third of Iraq, including its third-largest city, Mosul, the Obama administration launched its direct intervention in both countries, conducting air strikes and redeploying some 3,500 US troops to Iraq. Now the intervention has morphed into a war against ISIS dubbed "Operation Inherent Resolve."

More than a year after that "war" was launched, the grip of ISIS over large swathes of both Iraq and Syria remains virtually unchanged. The desultory character of the US campaign is explicable only from the standpoint that Washington has no desire to destroy the Islamist militia, which it still counts as one of the main fighting forces in the war for regime change, which remains the principal US objective.

What has now prompted the deployment of combat troops in Syria, along with the recent flurry of diplomatic activity in Vienna, is Russia's military intervention in support of the Assad government. In just one month of air strikes, the Russian military has done far more damage to ISIS and other Islamist militias than the US and its so-called coalition inflicted in the course of over a year.

It is in response to this Russian campaign, which is beginning to turn the tide against the al Qaeda-linked militias backed by Washington and its regional allies, that the US is sending in the Special Forces.

Simultaneously, it is trying to achieve through negotiations in Vienna with Moscow and Tehran, Assad's principal backers, what the US and its allies have been unable to impose through the protracted slaughter in Syria itself.

Outside of initiating a far broader US military deployment in Syria, it is difficult to discern any coherent strategy underlying the deployment of 50 Special Forces troops. It is widely reported that they are being sent to the northeast of the country to train, advise and coordinate the further arming of the Syrian Kurdish militia, the YPG, and a significantly smaller allied Syrian Arab tribal force.

© World Socialist Web Site

The YPG operates in the area with the tacit approval of the Assad government. Its main objective is to link up the area it controls in the northeast near the Turkish border with the border city of Kobani, further west, in order to carve out an autonomous Kurdish enclave.

Turkey, Washington's NATO ally, acknowledged this week that its forces had twice carried out attacks on the YPG, and has made it clear that it is prepared to intervene militarily to prevent the Syrian Kurdish militia from achieving its aims.

Thus, the US Special Forces unit faces the possibility of coming into armed conflict not only with ISIS, Syrian government forces and their Russian backers, but also with America's ally, Turkey.

In addition, utilizing the YPG as a proxy army for retaking territory from ISIS is complicated by the fact that the Kurdish militia was accused by Amnesty International earlier this month of carrying out "war crimes" against Arabs and Turkmens in the areas under its control. In some cases, it has razed entire villages and driven out their residents with the threat of calling in US air strikes against them.

Under these conditions, it is difficult to see how an advise-and-train mission with the YPG would prove any more effective in resolving the Syrian conflict than the notoriously failed Pentagon bid to train "vetted rebels."

Its purpose is a show of force directed first and foremost against Russia. As such, it can only be the precursor to an increasingly substantial and dangerous escalation of the US intervention, carrying with it the threat of an armed confrontation between the world's two largest nuclear powers.

US imperialism is responsible for the ravaging of Syria, with a quarter million dead and half of the population displaced. Backing and arming the Islamist militias, it sought to repeat the "success" of its regime change operation in Libya that ended with the overthrow of the government, the murder of Muammar Gaddafi and the descent of the country into chaos and civil war that continues four years later.

The escalation of the US intervention is a crime under international law. It has been authorized by neither the United Nations nor the Syrian government and represents a continuation of the militarist aggression launched by the Bush administration with the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Neither the deployment of US troops on the ground in Syria nor the bombing of the country from the air has ever been debated, much less approved, by the US Congress, and there is every indication that the launching of a new ground war in the Middle East is bitterly opposed by the vast majority of the American people.

The target of the US intervention is not ISIS and not merely the Syrian government. Washington seeks regime change in Damascus as part of a wider strategy of asserting hegemony over the Middle East and preparing for even bloodier military conflicts with Syria's main allies, Iran and Russia.

The US announced the deployment of ground troops in Syria during the same week in which plans were made public for the stationing of 4,000 NATO troops on Russia's borders, and as provocative US naval operations in the South China Sea raise the threat of a military confrontation with China.

Barack Obama, elected on promises to end US wars in the Middle East, is presiding over an unprecedented eruption of American militarism that threatens to drag the entire region and potentially the whole world into a military conflagration.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site