

US deploys F-15s to Syria, targeting Russian jets

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The US will send a squadron of F-15C fighter jets to Turkey's Incirlik air base, the US Defense Department (DOD) announced on Friday. The nature of the US war planes, which are specifically designed for dogfighting with other highly advanced fighter jets, indicates that the deployment carries a significance far beyond what its small scale would suggest.

The F-15 line of combat jets was developed in response to the unveiling in 1967 of the Soviet Union's MiG-25 "Foxbat" interceptor.

Because they are designed for air-to-air combat against other major powers, the US has, until now, seen no need to deploy the F-15C model to its Middle Eastern and Central Asian war theaters, where the opposing forces have no warplanes.

The sudden deployment, coming less than two months after Russia began sending its own SU-30 fighters to its new airbase in Latakia, Syria, makes clear that the jets have been deployed in response to Moscow's air campaign.

"The only reason F-15s are going to Syria is to shoot down Russian jets," the *Washington Times* titled its report Friday.

"US and Russia Sending Weapons to Syria Best-Suited for Shooting at Each Other," a *Time* magazine headline declared on Friday.

The US warplanes are being deployed to the same area where unauthorized crossings into Turkish airspace by Russian warplanes allegedly occurred last month, events which were seized upon as the basis for the latest round of anti-Russian war rhetoric by US and NATO officials.

"The deployment of the air-to-air combat planes comes after two Russian warplanes, active in Syria, strayed into Turkish airspace last month, triggering strong condemnations from Turkey and its NATO

allies. The deployment sends a message of NATO's resolve to protect its members following the Russian planes' intrusion," *US News and World Report* noted Friday.

The additional jets were sent after the Turkish government asked for greater US military aid in securing its border area. Even prior to Friday's announcement, the Turkish-Syrian border was already emerging as one of the most dangerous geopolitical fault lines worldwide. In October, the Turkish military shot down an unmarked military drone along the same border area, but the source of the drone has not been confirmed.

The stationing of the high-tech jets in this area marks another stride toward the establishment of a no-fly zone over northern Syria. The Obama administration has repeatedly resisted Turkish demands for an immediate no-fly zone, but last week top US defense officials told Congress that the option was "not off the table."

Analysts agree that a no-fly zone would necessarily also entail the creation of militarized areas on the ground directly below. The US took a major step in this direction this week, announcing the formation of a new proxy army this week, dubbed the Syrian Democratic Force. The SDF is composed of the Kurdish and Arab militia groups that have received parachute drops of US military assistance during recent weeks.

The force is largely a renamed faction of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militias, according to reports stemming from members of militant groups under the SDF umbrella. "The Syrian Democratic Force is basically just the YPG. It's a mask to avoid Turkish strikes and get more coalition support," former YPG spokesman Alaa al-Sheikh told the *Financial Times*.

The US is seeking to rebrand the YPG, which has

been implicated in systematic war crimes against the ethnic Arab population of northern Syria by a recent Amnesty International report, by grafting on small contingents of Arab fighters, including militants affiliated with Thuwar Raqqa, Jaish al-Thuwar and other factions with ties to Al Qaeda.

Under a thin “multi-ethnic” and “democratic” veneer, Washington is assembling yet another loosely federated proxy force, drawing largely from militant groups known to have razed dozens of villages to the ground during the past year alone.

It appears very likely that the SDF’s first mission will be to lead a ground offensive against the Syrian city of Raqqa, which now serves as a de facto capital for militants aligned with Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The planned attack on Raqqa faces skepticism by SDF’s Arab factions, however, who worry that YPG elements will take advantage of the offensive to further their own ambitions for a Kurdish state, creating conditions for ethnic conflict within the SDF coalition.

The heavy bombardment of Syrian targets by Russian air forces this week has underscored the grave risks accompanying the latest US escalation. The logic of imperialist military escalation finds highly concentrated expression on the battlefields of Syria. The bombardment of US-backed forces by Russian planes, intended by Moscow to bolster its client government in Damascus and create the conditions for a political settlement, has succeeded above all in provoking Washington to double-down on its own military operations.

With US-backed militias already engaged in bitter fighting against a Russian-led coalition along one front, in strategic areas of the western enclaves that remain largely under government control, Washington is preparing to launch an entirely new front.

Even as US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov discussed the possibility of engaging the Syrian opposition and the Assad regime in political negotiations on Friday, dozens of freshly arrived US Special Forces were preparing yet another US proxy force for offensives against areas where Russian air units are already involved in heavy fighting.

The US ground deployment, announced by President Barack Obama last week in defiance of his repeated vows that he would not send US troops into ground

combat, is only the beginning of a general intensification of US operations in both Syria and Iraq. US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter stated clearly last week that US forces are now planning their own “direct actions on the ground” in Syria and Iraq.

Washington and Moscow are being drawn ever closer to the front lines, on opposite sides of a raging civil war, under conditions where the US-backed coup in Ukraine and the massive US-NATO military buildup in Eastern Europe that followed have already dragged humanity to the brink of war between the two largest nuclear-armed powers.

NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg on Thursday called for members of the US-led alliance to prepare military deployments aimed at countering Russian military strength in the eastern Mediterranean, Black Sea and Baltic Sea.

Speaking to the media during a visit to Portugal, where NATO is holding its massive “Trident Juncture 2015” war games, exercises that are transparently intended to prepare the alliance for a general, European-wide war against Russia, Stoltenberg warned of “a military build-up which provides Russians with what many experts call Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities.”

The NATO alliance must respond with a military buildup stretching across the Eurasian landmass, Stoltenberg said. “The question on our agenda now is how to overcome, how to deal with the increased A2/AD capabilities of Russia in the Baltic, the Black Sea, and now in the Mediterranean,” he said.



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