

US escalates air and ground operations in Iraq and Syria

Thomas Gaist

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The US must prepare new deployments of ground forces to Syria as part of military operations that will continue for years to come, US Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James said Tuesday at the Dubai Air Show.

“Air power is extremely important,” James said. “It can do a lot, but it can’t do everything. Ultimately, it cannot occupy territory and very importantly it cannot govern territory.”

James continued: “This is where we need to have boots on the ground. We do need to have ground forces in this campaign.”

The US war in Syria and Iraq is “going to take years” to win, she added.

James’ comments point to the neocolonial agenda underlying Washington’s war in Iraq and Syria, which is presented to the public as a war against ISIS terrorism. Under the cover of counterterrorism, US imperialism is seeking to violently restructure the Middle East to eradicate Iranian and, above all, Russian influence in the region and consolidate its own hegemonic position.

In Syria, the major objective of the United States remains what it has always been since it began stoking up a civil war in 2011—the removal of the pro-Russian and pro-Iranian president, Bashar al-Assad, and his replacement by a US puppet.

To achieve its aims, as James’ comments indicate, the US is prepared to oversee the dismemberment of Syria and Iraq and their reduction to a handful of mini-states governed by a patchwork of ethnic and religious militias backed, for years to come, by US occupation forces.

The Air Force secretary’s remarks are only the latest comments by top US officials in recent days signaling new US military moves as part of a generalized escalation of the wars in Syria and Iraq.

On Saturday, in his keynote address to the Reagan National Defense Forum in Simi Valley, California, US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter reiterated recent

affirmations that the US is preparing to launch ground combat operations in both countries. He told the forum, “You will see us doing more [in Iraq and Syria]. And we need to do more, much more than air strikes.”

The preparations for new US ground operations are accompanied by an intensification of the American air war over Syria. The rate of US air strikes on Syria nearly doubled during the first week of November, according to the Defense Department.

The stepped-up US operations are in response to Russia’s military intervention in Syria, as Carter made clear. Moments after denouncing the “bad turn by Russia in the last year,” a reference to alleged Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, Carter declared, “[Russian President] Putin has not thought through what he is doing in Syria.” He accused Russia of “throwing gasoline on an already dangerous fire.”

Appearing on ABC’s “This Week” program on Sunday, Carter affirmed that the US is “absolutely” committed to new ground operations. Although technically deployed as “advisers,” US ground troops “may find themselves in combat,” he said.

One day prior to Carter’s speech in California, reports confirmed that the US had begun deploying F-15C dogfighting jets to the Turkish-Syrian border. The F-15s are designed for air-to-air combat and have never previously been deployed to the US war zones in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan. Under the present circumstances, their arrival is clearly intended as a threat against Moscow, whose MiG jet fighters the F-15 was designed to counter.

The F-15Cs, which are now stationed at Turkey’s Incirlik military base, will be joined by an additional squadron of F-15Es in the coming days, Pentagon spokesman Captain Jeff Davis told the media on Monday.

“As we ramp up the pace of ground operations there with the forces we are supporting, we’re going to see

more targeting opportunities,” Davis said.

The US escalation is accompanied by negotiations involving Russia, Iran, the European powers and US regional allies such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar on a possible political settlement that would ease Assad from power while leaving elements of his regime intact.

Reuters reported Tuesday that it had obtained documents showing that the Russian government had drafted proposals for a political transition in Syria that would draw in elements of the opposition and culminate in new presidential elections after a period of 18 months. The Russian government has denied the existence of such documents.

The US military escalation comes against the backdrop of mounting crisis within the Obama administration and the US state, which are wracked by divisions over policy in Syria and the broader Middle East. The Russian intervention, which has strengthened the position of Syrian government forces and weakened US-backed Islamist “rebels,” for the most part linked to Al Qaeda, has brought the divisions to a head.

Evidently under pressure from the military, the Obama administration is steadily backing away from pledges to avoid another US ground war in the Middle East. At the end of October, Obama announced that he had approved the deployment of US Special Forces to carry out ground operations in Syria.

On Tuesday, US Defense Department spokesman Peter Cook categorically rejected the possibility of joint US-Russian operations against ISIS. The US military “does not see an opportunity to coordinate and collaborate with the Russians in the ISIS fight,” Cook declared.

The reality on the ground is that Washington and Moscow are engaged in an escalating proxy war with the potential to ignite a military conflict between the two largest nuclear powers on the planet.



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