

US and European powers prepare military escalation in Iraq, Syria

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Barely more than two weeks after the terror attacks in Paris, it has become utterly clear that the US and European ruling classes intend to use the events as the pretext for massive escalations of the Syrian-Iraq war. A consensus is rapidly emerging for new ground and air operations against cities across Syria and Iraq.

Appearing on the Sunday talk shows yesterday, US presidential candidates and lawmakers brayed for an array of military moves against the war-ravaged region.

On “Face the Nation,” Jeb Bush called for the imposition of a no-fly zone and ground “safe zones” in Syria. Newly-deployed US ground troops should “be embedded with the Iraqi military,” and the US should seek to “reengage the Sunni tribal leaders that were effective partners during the surge,” Bush said. In northern Iraq, the US should “directly arm the Kurds,” he said.

US Senator Lindsey Graham called on US forces to launch new operations to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and eradicate Iranian influence in the region during the same segment of the TV show. Graham demanded operations be mounted to “push Assad out and not give away yet another Arab capital.”

Graham advocated sending at least 20,000 US ground troops into both Syria and Iraq, as part of a much larger Arab and European-based force that would seize and occupy areas now held by ISIS.

The new invasion of Iraq would enable the US to secure the country against Iranian influence, Graham said: “Iran is all over Iraq. They filled in the vacuum that was created when we left.”

Voices from within the military-intelligence establishment are similarly calling for new large-scale operations and scorched-earth methods.

In an extended commentary published last week, “ISIS: Boots on the Ground?,” the *Financial*

Times (FT) cited top Western military and security officials calling for aggressive new attacks against Iraq and Syria.

The article cites experts recommending new siege operations against Iraqi cities, including Ramadi, Tikrit and Mosul, as well as carpet bombing of civilian infrastructure and civilian areas relied on by ISIS forces.

The bloody 2004 US siege of Fallujah is “a model that should be applied” to ground operations against ISIS, British military expert Afzal Ashraf told the FT. The paper noted that the Fallujah operation “took thousands troops and months of violence,” and that, due to the operation, “the city of mosques became one of rubble.” Nonetheless, it went on to extensively quote Ashraf as he advocated Fallujah-style offensives across Iraq.

“The resources needed to do that were phenomenal,” FT quoted Ashraf, who served as a top counterterrorism official in Baghdad, as saying.

“The air campaign has its limits,” Ashraf said. “Tackling one city at a time is not going to be effective in getting rid of ISIS. You need to be hitting Ramadi, Tikrit, Mosul—and Syria too—simultaneously. That is a massive operation.”

The US-led war is entering a “new phase,” in which “new targets for the US and its allies include Isis’ economic infrastructure and military positions in civilian areas,” FT notes.

“We are not giving air power a chance. We could do it in a matter of weeks, not years,” US Air Force General David Deptula told the FT.

The retired US general complained that Washington had been too squeamish about attacking targets near civilian areas and infrastructure, “yielding an advantage to our adversaries that I find difficult to understand.”

He called on the US-led coalition to boost the scale of its bombings to a level comparable to the 1,200 strikes per day launched by American forces during the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War.

Even as Washington pushes for a devastating increase in its bombing operations, the deepening involvement of France, Germany, and Great Britain has made clear that Syria is becoming the central arena for a fully globalized proxy war.

Since the Paris attacks, the French military has massively accelerated the pace of its air campaign against northern Syria. French bombers will now receive assistance from German Tornado reconnaissance jets.

Germany plans to send some 1,200 troops along with naval and air force elements to the war zone, according to plans described by the chief of staff of the German armed forces, Volker Wiekert, on Sunday. Last week, German officials told *Der Spiegel* that the new force could quickly become involved in combat operations.

Britain also appears set for major new interventions, with parliament preparing to vote on a comprehensive British military package for Syria on Wednesday. Dozens of British SAS commandos will deploy to Syria in the coming weeks whatever the outcome of the vote, British Prime Minister David Cameron's office announced over the weekend.

Russia may be on the verge of deploying sizable ground combat forces of its own, according to Syrian and Syrian-Lebanese media.

Reports of Russian ground deployments come as tensions between Moscow and the Turkish government have surged to unprecedented levels after Turkish forces shot down a Russian jet last week. Russian and Syrian media responded by denouncing Turkey, pointing to Ankara's support for Islamist terror groups and the profits it draws from commercial oil flows under ISIS control.

"The Turkish government recently increased support for terrorists and the level of supplying them with arms, ammunition and munitions to continue their criminal acts in exchange for oil and antiquities stolen from Syria and Iraq at low prices, taking advantage of the presence of terrorists whom it enabled to control border areas," the Syrian state media outlet SANA wrote over the weekend.

Indeed, the Turkish state is deeply entangled in ISIS

and associated terror networks, which have grown out of the covert operations launched by the the United States, the European powers, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms to topple Assad.

Already last week, US forces carried out saturation bombing of hundreds of ISIS fuel trucks in northern Syria, where they were likely bound for Turkish buyers. The US move, analysts suggest, was triggered by Turkey's own turn to bombing raids against US-backed Kurdish militias.

As the US and European powers scramble to maximize their respective shares in a new carve-up of Syria, the escalating proxy war in Syria is spurring aggressive risk-taking by the regional powers, heightening the risk of a sudden conflagration.

Over the weekend, Israeli planes launched a sudden incursion against Syrian targets near the Lebanese border, moves which appeared to prompt subsequent incursions by Russian war planes into Israeli airspace.

These events all point to the escalating danger of a generalized conflagration and the eruption of a world war. After weeks of much-hyped efforts to cobble together some multinational deal or coalition to "end" the war in Syria, recent developments on the ground have made clear that the major powers are all hurtling towards conflict.



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