

Syria claims US airstrikes targeted government forces

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On Monday, Syria's Foreign Ministry accused the US of carrying out a deadly bombing raid against a Syrian government military installation in the eastern province of Deir al-Zour.

According to Syrian media, at least three Syrian soldiers were killed and 13 injured in the strike, which included at least nine salvos of jet-fired missiles. A number of military vehicles and a weapons cache were also reportedly destroyed.

If confirmed, the attack would mark the first known direct attack by US forces against Syrian government troops since the US-orchestrated proxy war began in 2011.

Syrian officials are claiming to have definitive proof that the US-led coalition was behind the strikes. Damascus immediately made formal appeals to the United Nations demanding that the international body repudiate the US operation, which the Syrian government described as an act of "flagrant aggression."

"The aggression on the military post hinders the efforts aiming to fight terrorism and reiterates that the US-led coalition lacks seriousness and credibility in the fight against terrorism," Syria's foreign ministry stated.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has also claimed, based on evidence drawn from local sources, that US forces were responsible for attacking the Syrian units. The US has recently stepped up its bombardment of Deir al-Zour, as confirmed by a *New York Times* report on the incident.

The US military has denied responsibility for the strikes. US military spokesman, Colonel Steve Warren, admitted that the US carried out strikes in Deir al-Zour on the same day, but said they were directed against targets more than 50 km away from the Syrian camp.

The Pentagon is "certain" that Russian forces

launched the strike, according to an unnamed official cited by the *Washington Post*.

"We are aware that Russia conducted long-range bomber strikes into Syria yesterday," the US military official reportedly said.

Carnegie Middle East Center analyst Yezid Sayigh rejected these claims, saying that the strikes were more likely launched by the US-led coalition to send a "political signal" to Russia.

Whatever their origins, the disputed strikes took place amid signs that the US-Russian proxy war over Syria is being replicated inside Iraq. The past week has seen hundreds of heavily armed Turkish forces and at least 20 Turkish battle tanks deployed across the border into northern Iraq, launching what appears to be the first phase of a Turkish ground invasion.

The Turkish forces have been massing near Mosul, around a military camp run by Turkish military cadres. The Turkish trainers have been preparing Sunni militias for operations aimed at seizing control of Mosul, according to recent reports in *Pakistan Today*.

As of Monday, some 900 Turkish forces and at least 20 battle tanks were positioned near Mosul, a city which has "symbolic" value as the object of bitter territorial disputes between the Turkish and Iraqi elites, according to Nineveh province governor Nawfal Akub.

The government in Baghdad has insisted that the Turkish forces entered Iraq "without approval or knowledge of the Iraqi government." Baghdad has threatened to respond with "all available options" should the Turkish forces fail to leave.

Turkish officials have rebuffed Iraqi demands for the withdrawal of the Turkish forces. Far from withdrawing in compliance with Baghdad's demands, Turkish government officials have made clear that Ankara is set on further deployments to the area.

New deployments will not be made until “the sensitivities of the Iraqi government are addressed,” Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu wrote in a letter issued Sunday.

The Turkish presence is working to “support local volunteers in the fight against terrorism,” Davutoglu stated.

“The military personnel for training will stay,” a Turkish government statement issued Monday read. “The discussion with the central government still continues.”

Turkey’s ruling elite is determined to get its share of the emerging imperialist carve-up of the Middle East through the deployment of its military forces in northern Iraq.

The Turkish incursion aims to “prove to the Russians and Iranians that they will not be allowed to have either the Syrian or Iraqi war theaters only to themselves,” said Lydian Selcen, a high-ranking former Turkish official who served as consul to Erbil in Iraq.

Ankara’s aim is “to establish its own sphere of influence in northern Iraq,” Atlantic Council senior analyst Aaron Stein similarly noted. According to expert analysis cited by Reuters, Turkey is ultimately seeking to “assert its influence in the face of increased Russian and Iranian involvement in Syria and Iraq.”

The Pentagon has not confirmed or denied involvement, instead maintaining silence on the matter. Amid ongoing US-Turkish joint military operations centered on Turkey’s border areas, however, there can be no doubt that Washington was at least aware of the operation and tacitly consented.

The Turkish incursion will inevitably spur on growing Russian and Iranian interventions in Iraq, under conditions where the US has committed to open-ended ground operations throughout the country.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Abadi has responded to the Turkish incursion with threats and denunciations against the Turkish elites, accusing them of benefiting from ISIS-controlled oil flows.

Echoing recent denunciations of Turkey by Moscow, Abadi “stressed the importance of stopping oil smuggling by the terrorist gangs of [ISIS],” saying that most ISIS oil is “smuggled through Turkey,” during an appearance with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier Monday.

“We must be prepared and ready to defend Iraq and

its sovereignty,” a statement released by Abadi’s office said on Monday.

While Abadi has sought to position himself as a US ally, he faces intense pressure from Iran and Iranian-backed Shi’a forces that oppose any expansion of Turkish influence in Iraq. Abadi’s remarks amount to a threat that his government will invite further Russian and Iranian intervention if necessary to stave off the predatory moves of Turkey, which is backed by the US and NATO.

Late Monday, Russian officials demanded emergency behind-closed-doors meetings of the UN Security Council to discuss the Turkish deployments.



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