

Behind US proposal for military cooperation with Russia

## Washington plans escalation of war for regime-change in Syria

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Even as it increases its troop presence and prepares a further escalation of US military violence in Syria—a move that could well trigger a war between the United States and Russia—Washington is publicly proposing to increase its military coordination with Moscow in Syria.

Last week, the Obama administration acknowledged having submitted a proposal to the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin for stepped-up collaboration in air attacks on the forces of the Al Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of Al Qaeda, in return for a Russian agreement to end attacks by Russian jets and Syrian government forces on anti-regime “rebels” openly backed by the US and its NATO and Gulf allies.

The five-year-old war for regime-change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the only Arab ally in the Middle East of both Russia and Iran, has already taken the lives of more than 250,000 Syrians and turned more than half of the country’s people into homeless refugees.

There has as of yet been no public response from Moscow. Putin, for his part, has made clear that he is prepared in principle to accept a government without Assad as part of an overall settlement with the US and its allies, but only in return for guarantees for Russian military and naval bases by a new Syrian government acceptable to Russia—demands that cut across Washington’s basic war aims.

Al Nusra, whose fighters operate alongside Washington-backed jihadist militias, is the major force defending the “rebel” position in the key city of Aleppo, which is increasingly surrounded and besieged by Russian- and Iranian-backed Syrian government forces. The main purpose of the US initiative to Russia

is to prevent the fall of Aleppo and buy time while the Obama administration prepares a major expansion of the war, which will most likely be delayed until after the November elections.

According to press reports, the White House is proposing “a number of measures” for US-Russian military cooperation in Syria, including joint air strikes and intelligence sharing. To the extent that the offer is more than a cover for US preparations to step up its aggression in Syria and its confrontation with Russia in both the Middle East and Eastern Europe, it is motivated primarily by the severely weakened position of US proxy forces on the ground in Syria. They have suffered major setbacks since Moscow launched its military intervention in support of the Assad regime in September of last year.

The partial ceasefire negotiated by the US and Russia and initiated last February has been used by US proxy forces to shore up their positions in Syria, with, however, only limited effect.

In the intervening period, the Obama administration and the Pentagon have announced the deployment of hundreds more Special Forces troops to the battlefields of the country and Defense Secretary Ashton Carter has made numerous statements pointing to a more direct role for the American military in the fighting.

US Secretary of State John Kerry has pledged to implement a “Plan B” for increased US military aid to the “rebels” and other moves to escalate the war should the already compromised ceasefire collapse. These measures could include supplying the “rebels” with hand-held ground-to-air missiles, capable of bringing down Russian military jets operating in Syria.

Within the US political, security and media

establishment, there are growing criticisms of Obama's policy and demands that Washington move more decisively against both Assad and Putin. There are reportedly sharp divisions within the administration itself.

Earlier this month, US State Department sources leaked a "dissent memo" authored by 51 mid-level department operatives calling for US air strikes against the Syrian government. Secretary of State Kerry, who headed up the campaign in 2013 for a full-scale US air war against Assad on the basis of false allegations of government chemical weapons attacks against civilians—a plan Obama cancelled at the last minute in favor of a Russian-proposed plan to dismantle the regime's chemical weapons stock—called the memo an "important statement" and held a cordial meeting with several of its drafters.

The reports of the administration's proposal for stepped-up military cooperation with Russia have evoked heated denunciations from sections of the media. The *Washington Post* published a lead editorial on Saturday headlined "Obama retreats from Russia in Syria—again." The newspaper complained, "Obama appears fiercely determined to learn nothing from his tragic mistakes in Syria." It warned that the "only tangible result" of the plan "would likely be the reinforcement of the Assad regime."

A *Newsweek* analysis, "Why is Obama Getting Into Bed with Putin in Syria?" similarly denounced the White House proposal, lamenting that the deal would block further US offensives aimed at weakening Assad and that "from now until January 2017, US objectives in Syria will be limited to lowering the level of violence as much as possible."

In the US election campaign, the danger of a wider war in the Middle East as well as war with nuclear powers Russia and China has been deliberately buried, so that there will be no opportunity for the broad anti-war sentiment in the population to find expression in the election.

Whichever party wins, however, the incoming administration will carry out a reckless escalation of militarism. Both the Democratic and Republican presumptive presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, have declared their support for intensified bombing and the imposition of a no-fly zone directed against the Syrian regime and its Russian

backers.



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