

Trump approves new Pentagon strategy to “annihilate” ISIS

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Defense Secretary James Mattis announced at a press briefing on Friday that President Donald Trump had approved a new Pentagon plan that would escalate the war for US domination of the Middle East and North Africa.

Mattis told reporters that the plan would aim to militarily encircle strongholds of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to “annihilate” the Islamist militia, which still controls significant portions of Syria and Iraq.

The immediate target is the ISIS capital of Raqqa in northern Syria, where a major offensive is being prepared by the US in coordination with the various Kurdish and Arab Syrian militias it has built up during the five-year conflict. The civil war has been stoked by the US and its regional allies with the aim of unseating Syrian President Bashar al Assad.

Mattis also reported that Trump had delegated the ability to authorize military operations to him and to commanders on the ground to speed up operations. “We’ve accelerated the campaign,” Mattis said, indicating that commanders were already taking advantage of their new-found authority.

The Obama administration used the emergence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria in 2014 to justify redeploying thousands of US troops to Iraq and deploying hundreds of troops to Syria, while opening a campaign of airstrikes across both countries.

The bloody campaigns by US and Iraqi forces to retake cities seized by ISIS, including Fallujah and Mosul, have resulted in the complete destruction of entire neighborhoods and have displaced hundreds of thousands of people. US airstrikes have killed thousands of civilians, with a significant uptick in casualties since Trump took office in January.

ISIS developed out of the invasion and occupation of

Iraq in 2003, in which the US stoked sectarian divisions between Shiites and Sunnis to assert its control, and the war for regime change in Syria beginning in 2011, in which the CIA and Pentagon supported Sunni Islamist militias, elements of which formed ISIS.

According to the Pentagon, ISIS now maintains branches and affiliates in multiple countries, all of which will require US military intervention across a broad swath of territory from Central Asia to West Africa.

The decision by Trump heralds a dramatic escalation of conflicts that have killed more than a million people and displaced tens of millions from their homes over the last 16 years under the guise of the so-called “war on terror.” In the eyes of military planners, the turn by the United States to use military force to offset its relative economic decline and assert its dominance over the entire globe is just in its beginning stages.

Military operations waged against ISIS and other Islamist militias are underway in Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the US recently dropped the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used in combat on a network of caves allegedly being used by the ISIS Khorasan affiliate.

The ever-expanding use of military force is not limited to the United States. At Friday’s press conference, Mattis singled out the deployment of 4,000 French troops to the Lake Chad region of West Africa. France has been fighting Islamist insurgents there since 2014, including Boko Haram militants who have pledged their allegiance to ISIS.

The announcement of the Pentagon’s wide-ranging war strategy came just one day after American war planes launched airstrikes on Shiite militias loyal to the Assad government near Syria’s borders with Jordan and Iraq. It was the first attack by the Trump administration

on forces aligned with Assad since the April 6 cruise missile strike on al-Shayrat airbase.

The pro-Assad paramilitary group that came under attack had allegedly come within 18 miles of a military base where American and British Special Forces are training Sunni militants.

Mattis noted the airstrike at the press conference on Friday, blaming the attack on the intervention of Iran in Syria. "It [the strike] was necessitated by offensive movement with offensive capability of what we believe was Iranian-directed forces inside an established and agreed upon deconfliction zone," he claimed.

Both Russia and Iran have intervened militarily to prop up their ally Assad. While the US military intervention in Syria, illegal under international law, is couched as an effort to defeat ISIS and eliminate the threat of terrorism, it is ultimately aimed at the ouster of Assad. This has created the conditions for a direct clash between the US and Russian and Iranian-backed forces that could quickly spiral out of control, precipitating a much larger conflict.

The announcement of the Pentagon's new strategy came as Trump left Washington for his first foreign trip in office. The first stop will be Saudi Arabia, where the president is expected to announce a record \$110 billion arms deal with the Saudi monarchy. The deal reportedly includes precision guided bombs that had been withheld by the Obama administration while it funneled billions of dollars of other weaponry.

The brutal Saudi onslaught against Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab world, aims to re-impose a Saudi- and US-backed puppet government. The war, which began in 2015, has killed thousands of civilians and pushed millions to the brink of famine. The latest weapons deal will further escalate the carnage.

Saudi Arabia has been using US weapons and support to wage an unrelenting air war and naval blockade against Yemen, creating a humanitarian crisis. Hundreds of thousands are now threatened by a deadly outbreak of cholera.

The US support for Saudi Arabia, which is one of the main funders of Sunni Islamist militias along with the other Gulf monarchies, belies the narrative that the US is waging a war to defeat these groups. These outfits serve as convenient props for American imperialism, used as proxy forces against those that stand in the way of American dominance and trotted out as an excuse for

the deployment the US military to every corner of the globe.



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