

US announces indefinite deployment of military forces in Syria

James Cogan
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US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson vowed yesterday that American imperialism will not relent from its neo-colonial ambition to overthrow the Russian- and Iranian-backed Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad. In a display of imperialist arrogance, Tillerson declared that the US will maintain military forces inside Syria indefinitely and not accept any government in Damascus that does not function as an American client state.

Tillerson reaffirmed the determination of the US to pursue regime-change in Syria in a speech to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in California. It was fitting that his address was hosted by former Bush administration National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, an individual who should be indicted for war crimes for her role in the illegal invasion of Iraq.

The fraudulent pretext that the sole motive of the US in Syria was to combat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been cast aside. Throughout his speech, Tillerson repeatedly denounced Iran for supporting the Syrian government. The representative of the power that invaded Iraq and props up monarchical dictatorships in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states accused Tehran of seeking “dominance in the Middle East.” He declared that the US was committed to “reducing and expelling malicious Iranian influence from Syria.”

Tillerson also demanded that Russia cease its backing for Damascus and “put new levels of pressure on the regime” to step aside and accept the installation of an American-controlled puppet state. The US objective, he asserted bluntly, was the “departure of Assad.”

The criminality, and hypocrisy, of the American ruling class has no limit. Amid the hysterical accusations of “Russian meddling” in the US elections,

Tillerson baldly asserted that the United States will decide the fate of Syria. Among the political forces that the US is working with are the very Islamist extremists that Washington exploited to justify its intervention into the seven-year civil war that has ravaged the country.

The recklessness of the policy outlined by Tillerson is immense. In pursuit of regime-change, the US is seeking to effectively partition Syria, formally carving off the north into an American protectorate under the control of Kurdish nationalist forces, while placing the eastern region of the country under Islamist militias.

Tillerson asserted that the US will channel so-called reconstruction aid into the areas held by its proxies, while seeking to enforce an economic embargo against the areas controlled by the Syrian government. The US zone will be protected from Syrian forces by the 2,000 US military personnel already in the country, and by US Air Force assets based in Iraq and the Gulf states.

The day before Tillerson’s speech, a spokesperson for the US forces in the Middle East announced plans to assemble and arm a 30,000-strong anti-Assad militia. Among those whom the US intends to enlist are hundreds of former ISIS fighters and members of Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias, such as the Al Nusra Front.

A major aim of the US plans is to sabotage and derail the Russian-led steps toward the convening of talks on ending the civil war in Syria. A conference is scheduled to take place in Sochi, Russia next month, to which various anti-Assad factions have been invited. Now, these elements have instead been provided with open-ended US military and financial backing to continue fighting.

It is estimated that the Syrian war has resulted in at least 500,000 deaths since 2011. More than five million

people have fled the country as refugees, and at least six million more have been displaced from their homes within Syria. Entire cities and towns have been reduced to rubble by the indiscriminate bombardments carried out by all sides in the murderous conflict.

Tillerson's speech portends not only the continuation of the horrors inflicted on the Syrian masses, but a major escalation of the violence.

The US agenda has been rejected by the Syrian government already. The Syrian foreign ministry issued a statement that said: "The American military presence on Syrian land is illegitimate and represents a blatant breach of international law and an aggression against national sovereignty."

Immediately on the horizon is the danger of large-scale military confrontations between US-backed forces, on one side, and the Syrian Army and the Iranian, Iraqi and Lebanese volunteers who are fighting alongside it in various Shiite militias. Having defeated rebel forces elsewhere in the country, the focus of Syrian government operations is shifting to retaking opposition-held territory in the north and east. In the air, these operations are still backed by Russian aircraft and helicopter gunships.

The obvious question posed by Tillerson's speech is whether American forces will attack Russian aircraft, with all the ramifications such an action would carry.

There is also the danger that US attacks in Syria could lead to open war with Iran or ignite a new civil war inside Iraq, with Shiite militias taking up arms against the American-backed government in Baghdad.

Turkey, a NATO ally of Washington, is no less opposed to the US plans. The Turkish government insists that the US-backed Kurdish nationalist YPG militia is a front for the separatist Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), which it condemns as a "terrorist" organisation and has brutally suppressed inside Turkey for decades. Last weekend, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan bitterly accused the Trump administration of "creating a terror army on our border."

While Tillerson's speech yesterday gave verbal reassurances to "address Turkey's concern with PKK terrorists" and vowed "close cooperation," the fact remains that Washington is backing a formation that the Turkish ruling class views as a threat to its internal stability and territorial integrity. Erdogan has made

repeated warnings that Turkey is prepared to invade northern Syria to prevent the YPG from consolidating the area into a de-facto Kurdish statelet. What would be the response of the United States?

The new stage in US imperialist intrigue in the Middle East is a further indictment of the myriad pseudo-left formations that supported the conspiracy to overthrow the Assad regime, claiming that the American-backed rebels were carrying out a "revolution" for "democracy." All those who opposed the US regime-change operation, including the *World Socialist Web Site*, were accused of "knee-jerk anti-imperialism."

Seven years on, the pro-imperialist character of the US proxy forces, whether it be the Kurdish nationalist formations or the Al Qaeda-aligned Islamist militias, is undeniable. As was the case from the outset, they are serving as Washington's tool to undermine Iranian and Russian influence in the Middle East and assert American dominance over the oil-rich region.

The outcome is the vastly heightened danger of a regional war or war between nuclear-armed powers.



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