

US bombs Syria in defense of its illegal occupation

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The US Air Force carried out a series of strikes against targets in Syria's eastern province of Deir Ezzor Thursday night, acts of illegal aggression to defend Washington's criminal occupation of the country in defiance of Syrian sovereignty and international law.

According to the Pentagon, the bombing raids were ordered by US President Joe Biden after a drone struck a US military maintenance facility at the Kharab al-Jir military airport near the city of Hasakah in northeastern Syria, killing one military contractor and wounding five US military personnel along with another contractor.

US munitions fell on the Harabish neighborhood of the densely populated city of Deir Ezzor, as well as on the town of Al Mayadin and a target in the Al-Bukamal desert. The Pentagon claimed that the strikes hit "facilities used by groups affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps."

Local residents, however, told Iranian and Lebanese media that the US missiles hit a grain depository and a rural development center. Iran's state-run media stressed that no Iranian had been killed in the US strikes.

The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed that the US bombings killed at least 11 militia members, including two Syrian citizens. Iran's *Press TV* quoted local sources as saying that those killed in the American attacks were Syrian soldiers.

On Friday it was reported that the US military base near Hasakah came under rocket attack. White House national security spokesman John Kirby told the media that the missile caused no casualties.

Late Friday there were reports that rocket attacks continued against three US bases, with at least one more US soldier wounded, and that the US military was carrying out strikes using fighter jets and attack helicopters.

US military spokesmen have made it clear that further and bloodier American military attacks may be in the

offing. Gen. Erik Kurilla, the chief of US Central Command, which oversees all US military forces in the region, told the US Armed Services Committee Thursday that they "are postured for scalable options" in supposed retaliation to "additional Iranian attacks." For his part, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin vowed that Washington "will always respond at a time and place of our choosing."

The attempts by the Biden administration, the military and the US media to present US strikes in Syria as "retaliatory" responses to "Iranian aggression" are fraudulent and cynical.

US forces are illegally occupying Syrian territory. Some 900 US troops, joined by an even greater number of US military contractors, are engaged in this occupation, supplemented by special forces rotated in and out of the country. They have been deployed in Syria's northeastern oil fields, denying the war-ravaged country access to sorely needed energy supplies and at Al-Tanf in the south, impeding traffic along the strategically vital Baghdad to Damascus highway.

The criminal character of this occupation, along with Washington's attempt to economically strangle the country with sanctions, has only been deepened by last month's catastrophic Turkish-Syrian earthquake, which killed thousands of Syrians and forced millions from their homes.

Continued under the pretext of combatting the remnants of ISIS (Islamic State), the occupation is in reality directed against the Syrian government, the Iranian-backed militias and the Russian military, which together played decisive roles in ISIS's defeat. ISIS was itself the product of the CIA-orchestrated war for regime change in Syria, in which Washington poured billions of dollars of arms and money into Al Qaeda-linked militias, fostering a conflict that killed hundreds of thousands and turned millions into refugees.

The US occupation is a continuation of this savage war. It is a violation of international law, sanctioned neither by the Syrian government nor the United Nations. Under these conditions, the armed actions of those resisting this occupation and seeking to drive the US out of Syria and restore the country's sovereignty are entirely legitimate.

The occupation follows three decades of US imperialist military intervention in the region which decimated entire societies, not only in Syria, but in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen as well, killing and maiming millions.

It is also directed at supporting the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine by countering Russia, whose military intervened in support of Syria's government in Damascus and remains deployed there. The threat of a direct military confrontation was underscored this week by allegations from the US military command that Russia has violated a previous agreement by flying armed jets over the Al Tanf US garrison every day during the month of March.

At the same time, Washington leans ever more heavily on its military presence in the Middle East to oppose China's growing economic and political influence in the Middle East.

China has become the largest investor in the Middle East, while its total trade with the region far outstrips that of the United States. In 2021, China's imports from the Middle East—largely oil and gas—were four times those of the US, \$130 billion versus \$34 billion; and Chinese exports were nearly triple those of American, \$129 billion versus \$48 billion. In 2021 alone, Chinese investments in the region increased by 360 percent.

Twenty years after the US launched its criminal war against Iraq, the country ranks among the top partners in China's Belt & Road Initiative, under a deal which trades the export of 100,000 barrels of Iraqi oil per day for major building projects funded by China.

It is hardly a coincidence that the sudden eruption of US "kinetic activity" in Syria has erupted in the wake of Beijing brokering a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia, which was previously a key ally of Washington in supporting the Al Qaeda-connected militias in Syria, and Iran, which backed Damascus against them.

The US military escalation also comes just days after the report that Syria and Saudi Arabia have reached an agreement to reestablish diplomatic ties, and after Syria's President Bashar al-Assad has made state visits to the United Arab Emirates and Oman, also both previously aligned with Washington in seeking his overthrow. One Arab government after another is resuming ties to Syria, despite intense US pressure.

Washington's continued use of military force in the Middle East, in an attempt to offset the decline of US imperialism's economic and political domination of the region, serves to expose the rank hypocrisy of all the propaganda about defending "human rights" and "national sovereignty" in Ukraine.

The proxy war being waged by the US and NATO against Russia represents a continuation and dangerous escalation of the decades of US military aggression against the peoples of Syria, Iraq and the rest of the region, whose sovereignty and human rights were laid waste by "shock and awe" bombardments, colonial-style occupation, massacres and torture.

The International Criminal Court (ICC), which has indicted President Vladimir Putin as a war criminal for Russia's evacuation of children from war zones in Ukraine, has kept its lips sealed in relation to Washington's flagrant violations of international law through its continued occupation and bombing of Syria, not to mention the more than 30 years of US imperialist crimes that preceded it.

Every US president over the past three decades deserves to be standing in the dock of a war crimes trial for the wars against Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen, along with unilateral sanctions regimes that have claimed the lives of millions, and the criminal CIA assassination and torture programs.

Washington, which has refused to recognize the ICC's jurisdiction, has gone so far as to enact legislation threatening to use military force against The Hague should the court attempt to try US military or political figures, while imposing sanctions like those used against terrorists and drug traffickers on ICC jurists for even daring to investigate charges of US war crimes in Afghanistan.

While the Pentagon has shifted its focus from the decades of wars of aggression in the Middle East to the preparation of new and potentially world-catastrophic nuclear wars against Russia and China, it still has the capacity to unleash massive violence against the peoples of Syria, Iran, Iraq and the rest of the region.



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