
WIN ★ WITHOUT ★ WAR

Syria: The Escalation of War

Advocacy Groups Condemn Escalation of War

CREDO Action- “Putting boots on the ground in Syria is both a broken promise by the President and bad policy. In 2013 President Obama stated unequivocally that he would ‘not put American boots on the ground in Syria. By breaking that promise today, President Obama is putting American lives at risk and drawing the United States further into a conflict that can not be resolved militarily.” [10/30]

Peace Action- “We should know by now that the first law of military conflicts is escalation. That’s why sending these troops into battle should trouble all Americans. With the ‘no boots on the ground’ promise broken there’s no telling how many U.S. troops will ultimately be sent to Iraq and Syria. Over a year into the U.S.-led bombing campaign what have we accomplished? The United States has spent over \$4.75 billion on over 6059 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. Watching the tragic refugee crisis spreading, we know that more bombing isn’t making the Syrian people any safer. A U.S. led attack in Syria, with its inevitable civilian casualties, strengthens recruitment for ISIS. Adding U.S. ground troops is just throwing gasoline on the fire. Instead, we need sustained diplomacy to end the Syrian civil war and we need to significantly increase humanitarian aid for the victims of the conflict.” [10/30]

Win Without War- “If bombing Iraq and Syria was going to bring peace and stability, they would be the most peaceful countries on earth by now. Rather than waging war, the Win Without War coalition urges America to pursue peace instead. The recent announcement of renewed diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict in Syria represent a very real opening to take an important step in that direction.” [10/27]

Experts Warn Against the Escalation of War

Colonel Andrew Bacevich (Ret.)- “There are some wars that are unwinnable and should not be fought, and where - if there is a solution to the problem, it has to come from nonmilitary means. The president has repeatedly, as president, argued that he has no desire to see this country perpetually engaged in war. And yet his actions have belied that claim, have instead had the effect of perpetuating the war, but perpetuating them in a sense that they continue to simmer, that they do not result in any kind of a resolution. To say that American decision makers have sought to “fix”—and I use that term in quotes—parts of the Islamic world where they intervened, whatever their intentions, the consequences have almost without exception been catastrophic.” [11/2]

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon- “The continuing violence is a clear indication that a political solution to the conflict in Syria is desperately needed. The fighting must stop now. There is no military solution to the crisis, not in Syria or anywhere else.” [11/2]

Phyllis Bennis, Institute for Policy Studies- “There is no military solution. So when you look at what President Obama is doing militarily, I think it’s important to recognize it’s not just insufficient, it’s making impossible the kinds of diplomatic and negotiated and humanitarian and other kinds of efforts that could have a chance of ending these wars.” [11/2]

Juan Cole, University of Michigan- “Putting US troops on the ground in northeastern Syria is illegal in international law. The big danger here is escalation. The special operations forces are being moved to the front out of frustration that American allies on the ground seem unable to make substantial progress against Daesh, which is increasingly ensconced among some 3 or 4 million people. But what if this doesn’t work, either? Won’t the number of special operations troops have to be increased? And maybe in the end you need US infantry? And then, boom, you have a big American army in Iraq and Syria again.” [10/27]

David Cortright, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies- “If the United States were to devote as much effort to political and diplomatic approaches as it does to military measures, the chances for success would increase. If our government were to send to the region thousands of diplomats, trained peacebuilders and aid workers rather than deploying more troops and building “lily pad” bases, perhaps we could begin to create those oases of sanity that are needed to counter the ravages of war.” [6/23]

Editorial Board, the New York Times- “Taking on Mr. Assad, a murderous leader who has lost all legitimacy, has obvious appeal in principle. But doing so would almost certainly be catastrophic because it would put the United States directly at war with Russia and Iran, which aid him militarily. Even if Washington were to prevail in forcing him from power, that could serve to embolden the Islamic State, which would only lead to more carnage.” [10/28]

Conor Friedersdorf, The Atlantic- “Without Congressional permission, public debate, or any attempt to rally the American public’s support, President Obama has ordered U.S. ground troops to a war zone, his most flagrantly unconstitutional war-making since he unlawfully helped to overthrow Muammar al-Qaddafi. This should perturb even proponents of a U.S. war against ISIS.” [11/2]

David Ignatius, The Washington Post- “The story of ISIS teaches the same basic lesson that emerged from America’s other failures in the Middle East over the last decade: Attempts by the United States or Islamist rebels to topple authoritarian regimes—in Iraq, Libya, and now Syria—create power vacuums. This empty political space will be filled by extremists unless the United States and its allies build strong local forces that can suppress terrorist groups and warlords both.” [10/29]

Robert Naiman, Just Foreign Policy- “If US military force were a magic wand for Syria, we should have seen some evidence for that in nearby Iraq in the last decade of war.” [9/30]

Micah Zenko, Council on Foreign Relations- “Mission creep has occurred because Obama continues to pursue a strategic objective that is totally unachievable. Just as there is no military solution, which both American and Russian officials claim while behaving otherwise, there is no resolution to the Syrian civil war without the explicit cooperation of the external powers that fuel and steer the conflict.” [10/19]

Former Congressman Ron Paul (R-TX)- “The president’s year-long bombing campaign against Syrian territory is a violation of that country’s sovereignty and is illegal according to international law. I cannot condemn in strong enough terms this ill-advised US military escalation in the Middle East. US interventionism has already done enough damage in Iraq and Syria, not to mention Libya. It is time to come home.” [10/27]

Jon Rainwater, Peace Action West- “Slipping free of the logic of escalation will not be easy. Only serious and well thought out political solutions can break the inexorable chain of military escalation. Thankfully, a number of members of Congress are opposing this escalation. Congress must come together to reject military escalation and support the truly effective diplomatic, political, and humanitarian solutions that will save Syrian lives and simultaneously make Americans safer.” [11/1]

David Rothkopf, FP Group- “Putin and politics are behind Obama’s decision to send troops to Syria. When military moves seem too small to make a difference, there’s usually another reason for them. If the Russian president hadn’t made his move into Syria, the United States would not have felt compelled to finally, belatedly, shore up support for anti-Islamic State and anti-Assad allies in that embattled, long-suffering country.” [10/30]

Ilya Somin, Law Professor, George Mason University- “If we decide to fight a war at all, it should only be in cases where there is widespread agreement that the war is justified and that we will do what is necessary to prevail... The president’s war against ISIS has been a lesson in the dangers of launching a military intervention without that kind of political support.” [10/30]

Peter Van Buren, former Foreign Service Officer- "In August 2014, [Obama told the nation we needed to re-intervene] on a humanitarian mission to save the Yazidis. No boots on the ground, a simple act of humanness that only the United States could conduct, and then leave. We believed. It was a lie. [We are] being told by that same president that Americans will again fight on the ground in Iraq, and Syria, and that Americans have and will die. We want to believe, Mr. President. We want to know it is not a lie. So please address us, explain why what you are doing. Tell us why we should believe you — this time — because history says you lie." [10/30]

Colonel Steve Warren- “We’re in combat. I thought I made that pretty clear ... That is why we all carry guns. That’s why we all get combat patches when we leave here, that’s why we all receive an immediate danger badge. So, of course we’re in combat.” [10/29/15]

Members of Congress Criticize Unauthorized Escalation of War

Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD)- “I continue to oppose authorizing any level of U.S. troops on the ground in Syria and I am greatly concerned that even a small number of Special Forces units could escalate into something broader and more long term. I support a negotiated political solution to end this brutal conflict, as it remains clear that there is no military solution.” [11/2]

Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ)- “Our military has been waging war against ISIL since last September, and Congress has been appropriating funds to pay for those operations...It’s past time for Congress to formally voice its support of the mission itself.” [6/8]

Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM)- “We should learn from the mistakes of the past and avoid taking actions where the risks and costs far outweigh the benefits. I firmly believe that the deployment of American ground forces in Syria is not the solution... The lack of will from Congress to vote on a new AUMF amounts to a total dereliction of its duties and responsibilities.” [10/30]

Rep. Jim Himes (D-CT)- “Unless we speak up and express the desire of the American people to fully support efforts to peacefully end to the Syrian Civil War using diplomacy, we risk the United States engaging in another open-ended conflict in the Middle East.” [10/29]

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA)- “It is past time for our elected officials to recognize that there is no military solution to the problems in the region. Only a comprehensive, regionally-led strategy that addresses the underlying political, economic, humanitarian and diplomatic challenges can ultimately degrade and dismantle ISIL.” [10/30]

Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA)- “Americans need to know that their elected leaders, both in the White House and in Congress, have a clear plan to bring this conflict to a peaceful end before it becomes another endless war. This starts with Congress doing its job and voting on an AUMF. A critical first step would be to call for a moratorium on all bombing by all parties, which would help to significantly stem the internal displacement of entire populations.” [10/30]

Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT)- “The bottom line is that it is well past time for Congress to do our constitutional duty and debate an authorization for the war against ISIL in Iraq and Syria...I hope that in the shadow of this new escalation, Congress will do its job and debate and pass an authorization to give legal standing to the administration’s fight against ISIL.” [10/30]

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT)- “I do not support American ground troops in Syria.” [10/13]

Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI)- “The Administration’s announcement that it will deploy Special Operations Forces into Syria to combat ISIL marks a major shift in U.S. policy—a shift that is occurring without congressional debate, is unlikely to succeed in achieving our objective of defeating ISIL and instead threatens to embroil the United States in Syria’s civil war and could bring us into direct confrontation with the Russian Federation military and Syrian government forces.” [10/30]

Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT)- “When will Congress finally accept its responsibility? The Constitution is clear that only Congress can authorize war. Make no mistake about it, this is a war. Yet, the legal framework justifying this war is loosely tied to the fumes of a Congressional authorization approved in response to the 9/11 attack on America over 14 years ago...Every Member of Congress should debate and vote on the Administration’s strategy. No more bobbing and weaving. We need to do our job.” [10/30]

Obama Administration vs Obama Administration

Regarding Russian Bombing in Syria:

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter- “There is a logical contradiction in the Russian position and now its actions in Syria. The Russian approach is doomed to fail.” [9/23/15]

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter- “Fighting ISIL without pursuing a parallel political transition only risks escalating the civil war in Syria – and with it, the very extremism and instability that Moscow claims to be concerned about and aspire to fighting. So that approach is tantamount ... to pouring gasoline on the fire.” [9/30/15]

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter- “Russia has chosen to double-down on their longstanding relationship with Assad, committing additional military hardware capabilities and personnel. This will have consequences for Russia itself. And I also expect that in coming days, the Russians will begin to suffer casualties in Syria.” [10/8/15]

President Barack Obama- “An attempt by Russia and Iran to prop up Assad and try to pacify the population is just going to get them stuck in a quagmire and it won't work.” [10/3/15]

President Barack Obama- “If you think that running your economy into the ground and having to send troops in, in order to prop up your only ally, is leadership, then we've got a different definition of leadership.” [10/9/15]

General Martin Dempsey (Ret.)- “The military instrument, while it can bring a degree of stability to provide an opportunity for those underlying issues to be resolved, in and of itself and solely, it cannot resolve (the conflict).” [9/22/15]

Regarding U.S. Troops in Syria:

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter- “We won't hold back from supporting capable partners in opportunistic attacks against ISIL or conducting such missions directly, whether by strikes from the air or direct action on the ground.” [10/27/15]

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest- “The fact is, our strategy in Syria hasn't changed. The core of our military strategy inside of Syria is to build up the capacity of local forces. To take the fight to ISIL on the ground in their own country ... This is an intensification of a strategy that the President announced more than a year ago.” [10/30/15]

Secretary of State John Kerry- “President Obama has made a very strong and forceful and simple decision entirely in keeping with his originally stated policy that we must defeat and destroy Daesh. I can't predict what the future will bring when our policy is to destroy Daesh, to fight back against this evil. But I do think the president has made a judgment that I completely advocated for and concur in.” [10/31/15]

President Barack Obama- “Keep in mind that we have run special ops already and really this is just an extension of what we are continuing to do. We are not putting U.S. troops on the front lines fighting firefights with ISIL. I have been consistent throughout that we are not going to be fighting like we did in Iraq... That doesn't solve the problem.” [11/2/15]

President Barack Obama- "I will not put American boots on the ground in Syria. I will not pursue an open-ended action like Iraq or Afghanistan." [9/10/13]

President Barack Obama- “In Iraq, the United States learned the hard lesson that even hundreds of thousands of brave, effective troops, trillions of dollars from our Treasury, cannot by itself impose stability on a foreign land. Unless we work together to defeat the ideas that drive different communities in a country like Iraq into conflict, any order that our militaries can impose will be temporary.” [9/28/15]