
WHY IS THE U.S. STILL IN SYRIA?

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PARIS -- Just days after the U.S. and Russia agreed to a cease-fire in Syria to suspend bombing of anything except Islamic State targets, American-led airstrikes bombed the army of the sovereign nation of Syria -- a nation at war with ISIS on its own soil -- killing 62 soldiers and injuring 100 more, according to Russian authorities.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the Islamic State launched an attack as soon as the Syrian Army was bombed.

"Immediately after the airstrike by coalition planes, Islamic State militants launched their offensive," Russian General Igor Konashenkov said.

The Islamic State must have been pleasantly surprised to learn that it effectively had an air force.

U.S. Central Command released a statement acknowledging the strike.

"Coalition forces believed they were striking (an Islamic State) fighting position that they had been tracking for a significant amount of time before the strike," said the statement. "The coalition airstrike was halted immediately when coalition officials were informed by Russian officials that it was possible the personnel and vehicles targeted were part of the Syrian military."

Syrian officials weren't exactly placated by the American non-apology, deciding that the strike signaled the end of the cease-fire imposed on them in their own country, and promptly resuming bombardment of the so-called "Syrian rebels" trained, armed and funded by the West and its allies.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's reaction to Syria's self-defense was to whine to the United Nations about Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"The important thing is the Russians need to control Assad, who evidently is indiscriminately bombing, including of humanitarian convoys."

So we're going to play the humanitarian card again, are we, Mr. Kerry? It's like, "Hey, sorry that we bombed you and killed your soldiers. We obviously didn't mean it. After all, we'd just agreed to a cease-fire. Stop defending yourselves and relax so we can get you some Band-Aids and granola bars now, OK?"

Whenever you hear about a humanitarian mission in the context of an active war zone, be wary of a shady agenda lurking behind it. Many of today's terrorist cesspools in the Middle East and North Africa became so under humanitarian pretexts. It's really the only pretext under which you can sell

a war these days.

The Syrian rebel movement was created under the pretext of humanitarianism. That noble gesture has translated into more than \$1.2 billion in Defense and State Department budget appropriations since 2015. That's a lot of Pop-Tarts!

A great deal of that money was budgeted for the "Syria Train and Equip Fund," which, according to a Defense Department report, includes Russian weapons such as AK-47s and DShK machine guns. The report specifically states: "This is a transition from U.S. weapons to FSB (Russian Federal Security Service weapons)."

It's an interesting way to fill the Middle East with weapons while still being able to claim that you didn't leave any U.S. weapons behind -- much like U.S. President Barack Obama was able to brag in the aftermath of the Libyan military intervention that victory came without having to set any U.S. "boots on the ground."

Does "humanitarian" action include the \$400 monthly stipend paid to foreign fighters in Syria trained by the U.S. military? With \$6 million set aside for these stipends in 2017, that adds up to 1,250 U.S.-trained foreign fighters.

Gulmurod Khalimov, a former police commander from Tajikistan, participated in several counterterrorism training courses -- some of them conducted in the United States -- as part of the State Department's Diplomatic Security/Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program. The State Department now acknowledges that Khalimov has defected to ISIS. How many more will there be like him?

The Defense Department report takes pains to refer to the Syrian rebels as the "VSR" -- Vetted Syrian Rebels. It's probably fair to question the terrorist-vetting capacity of the U.S. government.

U.S. authorities didn't do such a great job of vetting Ahmad Khan Rahami, suspected of planting pipe bombs and pressure cooker bombs that detonated in New York City and New Jersey last weekend. A naturalized U.S. citizen from Afghanistan, Rahami reportedly made several trips to terrorist strongholds in Pakistan and Afghanistan in recent years but was nonetheless able to skirt the radar of U.S. intelligence services.

Unless the goal is to actually perpetuate the Islamic State, then it's time for the U.S. to cut its losses in Syria and let Russia mop up this mess.

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