

MISSION CREEP HITS SYRIA TARGETING, TRAINING BEFORE FIRST TOMAHAWKS FLY

Even while Barack Obama and John Kerry are busily lobbying for a positive vote in Congress for their Not-War in Syria, it appears the Defense Department isn't waiting for a pesky thing like Congressional approval or even the official start (as opposed to already ongoing but covert) of US actions to begin their usual process of mission creep that is undoubtedly to be followed by cries of "Just six more months and victory will be ours!". The mission creep on targeting threatens the propaganda push that so far has been centered on selling the action as limited. We have New York Times articles this morning stating that Israel goes along with the idea of limited strikes but definitely doesn't want to go all the way to regime change where radical Sunni groups might seize power, while at the same time we have the Pentagon claiming they've been tasked with expanding the number of targets for the strike. From the latter:

President Obama has directed the Pentagon to develop an expanded list of potential targets in Syria in response to intelligence suggesting that the government of President Bashar al-Assad has been moving troops and equipment used to employ chemical weapons while Congress debates whether to authorize military action.

Mr. Obama, officials said, is now determined to put more emphasis on the "degrade" part of what the administration has said is the goal of a military strike against Syria – to "deter and degrade" Mr. Assad's ability to use chemical weapons. That means expanding beyond the 50 or so major

sites that were part of the original target list developed with French forces before Mr. Obama delayed action on Saturday to seek Congressional approval of his plan.

For the first time, the administration is talking about using American and French aircraft to conduct strikes on specific targets, in addition to ship-launched Tomahawk cruise missiles. There is a renewed push to get other NATO forces involved.

See? It's the fault of all those dirty hippies insisting on following an old piece of paper and forcing the President to get a permission slip from Congress before taking action. That delay is why we have to expand the number of targets.

We are left to ponder just how it will be possible to magically target and kill Syrian forces tasked with moving chemical weapons around without actually hitting those weapons—which the forces are in the process of hiding. What could possibly go wrong here?

But I want to focus more fully on this AP article. Marcy had just read it when she sent out this tweet:

Press coverage from the Chuck-Hagel-Says-It's-Covert training that HAS BEEN GOING ON in Jordan being given real time machine treatment.

— emptywheel (@emptywheel) September 6, 2013

That, along with the title: "US officials: US considers training Syria rebels", suggests that the article is an expansion of the effort I outlined earlier in the week, where Barack Obama is trying to change both the date and the size of the first CIA-trained death squads to enter Syria, most likely because they are somehow tied up either as targets of the chemical weapons

attack or as perpetrators of a false flag operation.

Diving into the article, though, we see that this is about adding to the death squad training by expanding into a much larger operation where US troops are directly involved in training a large force (for the Afghanistan analogy, this proposal is to move beyond the CIA training Afghan Local Police—the militias who become death squads—for our military to train the actual Afghan National Army, which is about ten times larger):

The Obama administration is considering a plan to use U.S. military trainers to help increase the capabilities of the Syrian rebels, in a move that would greatly expand the current CIA training being done quietly in Jordan, U.S. officials told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Gosh, where have we done that before? I have probably written at least fifty posts on the multiple failures we have seen from US efforts to train troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these failures trace directly to David Petraeus, who built much of his career on false claims of training successes. The ongoing quagmires in both countries are testament to the abject failure to produce fighting forces in the US mold.

Misinformation is scattered throughout the AP article:

The CIA has been training select groups of rebels in Jordan on the use of communications equipment and some weapons provided by Gulf states. The new discussions center on whether the U.S. military should take over the mission so that hundreds or thousands can be trained, rather than just dozens.

Recall that earlier this week, I cited

information from the Jerusalem Post that the first death squad group, which entered Syria on August 17, totaled 300 and that another group entered two days later. We already are at hundreds trained. This proposal almost certainly is aimed at training tens or hundreds of thousands of troops, nor hundreds or thousands. Discussing the expected force size is pointless, though, because DoD routinely lies about force size from training.

Oh, and one point is completely overlooked in the AP article and the announced plans. Nobody seems to notice that Syria is not Afghanistan, where the country has been at war for decades and the infrastructure has been totally wiped out. If these are Syrians we are talking about training and if they are approaching the age of 20 or older, they already have been trained. From the CIA's website, we see this about mandatory military service in Syria:

18 years of age for compulsory and voluntary military service; conscript service obligation is 18 months; women are not conscripted but may volunteer to serve; re-enlistment obligation 5 years, with retirement after 15 years or age 40 (enlisted) or 20 years or age 45 (NCOs) (2012)

Syrian males who reach the age of 18 must spend a year and a half in the military. So if we need to train fighters for Syria, are we training women who didn't volunteer, child soldiers or people who aren't Syrian? [I owe a hat-tip to someone on Twitter who I saw mention the obligatory military service in Syria, but can't remember who said it.] Not to worry, though, our military will "screen" those they are about to train:

It would require getting approvals from the host country, finding appropriate locations, getting the right number of personnel in place to conduct the training and setting up a vetting system

to insure that instruction was not provided to any rebel groups that may not be friendly to the U.S.

Never mind that the Afghanistan experience has taught us that training provides opportunities for green on blue killings and that screening is so difficult that it can be necessary a second time. I'm sure this will work out perfectly this time. Maybe we can even put Petraeus back to work and give him the job of lying about how well this training is going.

One last note. See that post at the top of the page? Thank you so much for adding to the two million or so visitors we have had to emptywheel.net. Your support keeps the servers humming and Marcy's weed-whacker in working order. Thank you in advance for whatever you can spare, even if it is only page clicks.