



5,337 U.S. Airstrikes against Syria: When Is « Direct Military Intervention » Not Direct Military Intervention?

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“President Obama has long refused to approve direct military intervention in Syria,” the New York Times asserted in an editorial ([9/29/16](#)) about “Vladimir Putin’s Outlaw State.”

That’s a peculiar thing to say, given that the Times regularly covers the United States’ ongoing direct military intervention in Syria. Since 2014, according to [official Pentagon figures](#), the US has carried out 5,337 airstrikes in Syria. According to the monitoring group Airwars, these airstrikes (along with a few hundred strikes by US allies) have [likely killed](#) between 818 and 1,229 Syrian civilians.

Nor is direct US military intervention in Syria limited to aerial attacks. In May 2015, the New York Times ([5/16/15](#)) reported on a combat raid by US Delta Force commandos in eastern Syria. Later that year, the Times ([10/30/15](#)) observed that President Barack Obama had announced he was sending (in the paper’s words) “several dozen” special forces troops on an “open-ended mission” inside Syria.



MIDDLE EAST

ISIS Official Killed in U.S. Raid in Syria, Pentagon Says

By HELENE COOPER and ERIC SCHMITT MAY 16, 2015



WASHINGTON — American Special Operations forces mounted a rare raid into eastern [Syria](#) early Saturday, killing a leader of the Islamic State and about a dozen militant fighters, as well as capturing his wife and freeing an 18-year-old Yazidi woman who Pentagon officials said had been held as a slave.

In the first successful raid by American ground troops since the military campaign against the Islamic State began last year, two dozen Delta Force commandos entered Syria aboard Black Hawk helicopters and V-22 Ospreys and killed the leader, a man known as Abu Sayyaf. One American military official described him as the Islamic State’s “emir of oil and gas.”

This somehow does not meet the New York Times’ definition of “direct military intervention in Syria.”

Just a couple of weeks ago, the Times ([9/16/16](#)) wrote about three dozen more special forces going to aid Turkish troops inside Syria. Officially, these will have an “advise and assist” role—but the Times ([12/27/15](#)) has elsewhere noted the frequent US practice with regard to special forces of “resorting to linguistic contortions to mask the forces’ combat role.”

The Times, for its part, is engaging in some kind of linguistic contortion of its own to make none of this qualify as “direct military intervention in Syria.” Presumably it has something to do with the airstrikes and special forces not being aimed at the Syrian government of Bashar Assad, but at the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS—a rival to Assad’s power in Syria that the US is semi-officially at war with, even as Washington provides [arms and training](#) to other armed groups trying to overthrow Assad.

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