



Peace Action  
8630 Fenton Street, Suite 524  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Ph. 301.565.4050 Fax 301.562.7305  
www.peace-action.org

## Oppose Military Escalation in Iraq and Syria

### ***A Large U.S. Ground Force Would Further Destabilize the Region, Risk Escalation***

During the campaign, [Mr. Trump supported adding U.S. ground troops to fight ISIS saying](#),<sup>1</sup> “We really have no choice, we have to knock out ISIS... I would listen to the generals, but I’m hearing numbers of 20,000-30,000 [troops in Iraq and Syria].” Deploying even a fraction of those numbers would be a major foreign policy blunder.

- ISIS has repeatedly expressed its desire to draw the U.S. into a ground war because it would amount to a [major propaganda victory](#)<sup>2</sup> for the terrorist group.
- Even if a large troop deployment succeeded in pushing ISIS out of its strongholds, the group would [adapt and move underground](#)<sup>3</sup> while continuing to mount attacks and recruit new fighters. Without a clear and achievable objective and exit strategy, a large troop deployment is doomed to result in another American quagmire, risking countless American lives and further destabilizing the region.
- Putting a significant number of U.S. troops in Syria would dramatically increase the risks of accidental or incidental confrontation with Syrian and/or Russian forces, which could escalate the war in Syria in unpredictable ways and lead to a broader military conflict.

### ***More Air Power is Not the Answer***

The U.S. led bombing of Iraq and Syria has been extremely expensive and ultimately counterproductive to the goal of defeating terrorism. While some argue it has helped local forces secure short term battlefield gains against ISIS, it has also fueled terrorist recruitment efforts and reinforced anti-American sentiments, the effects of which will be felt for years to come.

- When Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) visited the headquarters of the U.S. air campaign against ISIS in September 2015, he was told that the campaign had killed about 18,000 ISIS fighters. When he asked how many new fighters the group had recruited since the campaign began roughly one year prior, he was told that roughly the same number had joined ISIS in that time. [Sen. Murphy wrote](#)<sup>4</sup> of this realization, “It can’t help but force me to wonder whether, like in the Iraq War, we are killing just as many as are created because our presence in theater is a limitless recruitment tool for the enemy.”

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<sup>1</sup> Nussbaum, Matthew, *Trump calls for ground troops in Iraq, Syria*, Politico, March 10, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Callimachi, Rukmini, *U.S. Seeks to Avoid Ground War Welcomed by Islamic State*, New York Times, December 7, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Landay, Jonathan, Warren Strobel, and Phil Stewart, *As Islamic State is Pushed Back in Iraq, Worries About What’s Next*, Reuters, April 12, 2016

<sup>4</sup> Murphy, Chris, *What I Learned From My Five-Day Trip to the Middle East*, Medium, September 14, 2015

- [According to the Department of Defense](#),<sup>5</sup> as of October 15, 2016, Operation Inherent Resolve has cost taxpayers over \$10 billion, averaging \$12.6 million per day, a majority of which has been spent on the U.S. air campaign. Future funding for defeating ISIS could be put to better use by investing in efforts to cut off the flow of weapons and foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria, block exports of ISIS commodities and counter ISIS's media strategy for recruiting new fighters.

### **Oppose Military Escalations Against the Assad Government**

- **No-Fly Zones Won't Fly:** Imposing a no-fly zone in Syria [would involve bombing Syrian air defenses](#),<sup>6</sup> and potentially Russian air defenses as well. It would also entail maintaining the threat to shoot down any plane that violates the zone which, given Russia's stake in propping up the Assad government, risks a broader military confrontation with Russia that could spiral out of control.
- **Safe Zones Aren't Safe:** In order to protect a safe zone on the ground, the U.S. would have to deploy a [significant number of troops](#)<sup>7</sup> to enforce the borders of the zone, putting more American lives at risk and raising the prospect of another prolonged deployment of U.S. troops in the Middle East.

### **Prioritize Diplomatic and Humanitarian Strategies**

Rather than escalating U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Syria, the U.S. should focus on diplomacy to end the Syrian civil war, humanitarian aid and refugee resettlement to address what is arguably the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet, and diplomatic efforts with countries in the region to disrupt ISIS's financing and recruitment efforts.

- In September 2016, 59 House Representatives sent a [letter to President Obama](#)<sup>8</sup> encouraging him to continue pursuing diplomatic talks to end the Syrian civil war. Offering a simple and compelling reason to stay the diplomatic course, they wrote, "There is simply no realistic alternative to a diplomatic and political resolution of the Syrian civil war that takes into account the interests of Syria's diverse communities as well as the interests of all nations in a peaceful, stable Middle East." While any outright military victory in the war is unlikely, no military victory will lead to a sustainable peace in Syria. Only diplomacy has the potential to achieve that.
- The Syrian civil war has led to the worst refugee crisis since WWII, and an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe within the borders of Syria. According to [Oxfam International's analysis](#)<sup>9</sup> of which countries are doing their fair share to address the crisis, based on the size of the countries' economies, the U.S. is only accepting 7% of its fair share of Syrian refugees, and only contributed 76% of its fair share to humanitarian programs in 2015. We can, and must, do more.

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<sup>5</sup> *Weekly Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Cost Report through October 15, 2016*, U.S. Department of Defense, October 15, 2016

<sup>6</sup> De Young, Karen, *Russian Air Defense Raises Stakes of U.S. Confrontation in Syria*, Washington Post, October 17, 2016

<sup>7</sup> Wong, Kristina, *State: 'No Viable Option' for Safe Zones in Syria*, The Hill, November 4, 2015

<sup>8</sup> *59 Dems Ltr to Obama Supporting Syria Diplomacy*, Politico, September 27, 2016

<sup>9</sup> *Syria Crisis Fair Share Analysis 2016*, Oxfam International, February 1, 2016