

How Serious Is Obama About the Air War Against ISIS?

It's becoming increasingly clear that President Obama has no intention to actually "destroy" the Islamic State. Even his much-vaunted air war represents a mere shadow of American military capabilities. Here's Max Boot in a must-read post over at *Commentary*, comparing the air effort in Iraq and Syria to the opening phase of the bombing campaign against al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan:

"RAND's Benjamin Lambeth summed up the Afghan air campaign as follows: '[D]uring the 75 days of bombing between Oct. 7, when Enduring Freedom began, and Dec. 23, when the first phase of the war ended after the collapse of the Taliban, some 6,500 strike sorties were flown by CENTCOM forces altogether, out of which approximately 17,500 munitions were dropped on more than 120 fixed targets, 400 vehicles and artillery pieces, and a profusion of concentrations of Taliban and al Qaeda combatants.'

"Now compare with the statistics on the current U.S. aerial bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria. According to Central Command, in the 59 days between Aug. 8, when the campaign started, and Oct. 6, the U.S. has conducted 360 strikes utilizing 955 munitions."

He continues:

"The bare numbers understate the actual difference, moreover, because the U.S. was dropping heavier bombs from heavier aircraft such as the B-52 in Afghanistan, which have so far not been utilized in Iraq/Syria. Moreover, the effect of strikes in Iraq/Syria is not as great because Obama has refused U.S. Special Operations personnel permission to go out into the field alongside indigenous forces to call in

airstrikes as they did so effectively alongside the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan.”

If you wonder why Kobani’s defenses still seem to be crumbling and why the Islamic State is now on the very outskirts of Baghdad despite attacks from the world’s most powerful military, that’s why. Let’s put aside the argument—for the moment—that even under the best of circumstances air power alone is insufficient for victory, the numbers show that we’re not dealing with the best of circumstances. Instead, we’re waging an extremely low-intensity war from the air, one far below our capabilities. To borrow a term I heard all the time in Iraq, the Navy and Air Force are being “set up for failure.”

So it should be no surprise that our missile strikes against the “Khorasan Group” (as Andrew McCarthy notes, that’s al-Qaida, by the way) have proven basically as effective as the missile strikes against al-Qaida before 9/11. They’re still plotting away:

“The strikes on a facility near Aleppo killed only one or two key members of what is referred to as the Khorasan Group, officials said, because many of the militants had scattered amid news reports highlighting their activities.

“Among those who survived is a French-born jihadist who fought in Afghanistan with a military prowess that is of great concern to U.S. intelligence officials. The group is believed to be continuing its plans to attack the West, officials say.”

But never fear. Our president is thinking hard about the war against jihadists. He’s about to make a bold move, one that could even provoke a constitutional crisis. He’s considering closing Gitmo with this “pen and phone:”

“The White House is drafting options that would allow President Obama to close the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, by overriding a congressional ban on bringing

detainees to the U.S., senior administration officials said.

“Such a move would be the latest and potentially most dramatic use of executive power by the president in his second term. It would likely provoke a sharp reaction from lawmakers, who have repeatedly barred the transfer of detainees to the U.S.”

“Sharp reaction” is an understatement. This is how he wants to spend his remaining political capital? Not by taking risks to lead the fight against our sworn and deadly enemies, but instead by forcing large-scale releases from Gitmo and treating the rest of the prisoners as nothing worse than particularly dangerous mafia dons?

He has learned nothing. He is learning nothing. And we have to pray fervently that no more Americans will pay the price.

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