

U.S. Military Given Green Light to Strike ISIS in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – U.S. military commanders have been given the authority to target Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan, the Pentagon said on Thursday, the first such order beyond Iraq and Syria, where the militants control parts of both countries.

The U.S. State Department said last week that it had designated Islamic State's offshoot in Afghanistan, known as Islamic State-Khorasan, as a foreign terrorist organization.

U.S. forces could previously strike Islamic State in Afghanistan but it was under more narrow circumstances, such as for protection of troops.

Senator John McCain of Arizona, a Republican who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the administration of President Barack Obama, a Democrat, "seems to be waking up to the fact that more than a year into the U.S. military campaign, ISIL's reach is global and growing."

McCain told a hearing on Thursday that the authorization given by the White House was much needed and "many of us may be interested to know that we confined our attacks on ISIL to Iraq and Syria."

ISIL is another name for the Islamist militant group, which has supporters and sympathizers around the world who have carried out bombings and gun attacks on civilians, notably in Paris in November and San Bernardino, California, in December.

A Pentagon spokesman, Capt. Jeff Davis, said there had been an adjustment to the authorization for U.S. forces in

Afghanistan, but he did not give details on when exactly it was given.

“As part of this mission, we will take action against any terrorist group that poses a threat to U.S. interests or the homeland, including members of ISIL-Khorasan,” Davis said.

Davis said there had been “some” strikes on the group in recent days.

The change in the authorization was first reported by the Wall Street Journal. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

According to the State Department, Islamic State-Khorasan was formed in January 2015, based in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, made up of former members of the Pakistani Taliban and Afghan Taliban.

U.S. Army General John Campbell, who leads international forces in Afghanistan, has said Islamic State had coalesced over the last five or six months in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces and had been fighting the Taliban for several months.

(Editing by Grant McCool)

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