



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on February 26, 2021

Syria Strike Angers Some Democrats. Rand Paul: Where Is POTUS' Authority?

Top Democrats aren't very happy about President Joe Biden's retaliatory airstrike in Syria overnight.

Members of Biden's own party, including failed vice presidential candidate Senator Tim Kaine, want to know the constitutional justification for the bombing. Congress did not authorize the move, they argue.

The administration says the strike was payback for an attack against Americans in Iraq on February 15.

While good enough for some Republicans, Senator Rand Paul and his fellow Kentuckian in the House, Thomas Massie, aren't buying that excuse.



AP Images

The Strike

The strike hit a crossing on the Iraq-Syria border and was "a relatively small, carefully calibrated military response," the [New York Times reported](#):

Seven 500-pound bombs dropped on a small cluster of buildings at an unofficial crossing at the Syria-Iraq border used to smuggle across weapons and fighters.

The strikes were just over the border in Syria to avoid diplomatic blowback to the Iraqi government. The Pentagon offered up larger groups of targets but Mr. Biden approved a less aggressive option, American officials said.

The American airstrikes on Thursday "specifically destroyed multiple facilities located at a border control point used by a number of Iranian-backed militia troops, including Kataib Hezbollah and Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada," [Pentagon spokesman John] Kirby said.

Kirby told reporters the strikes answered [an attack in Erbil](#), Iraq, that killed a Filipino contractor working with American forces and wounded others, including a Louisiana National Guardsman.

[Reported the Times](#):

"We have acted in a deliberate manner that aims to de-escalate the overall situation in both eastern Syria and Iraq," Mr. Kirby said.

The attack on the Erbil airport was claimed by a little-known group called Awliya al Dam, or Guardian of the Blood, brigades. The group also claimed responsibility for two bombings against U.S. contractor convoys in August.

Little is known about the group, including whether it is backed by Iran or related to the



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organizations that used the facilities the American airstrikes targeted on Thursday. Some American officials contend that the group is merely a front for one of the better-known Shia militias.

Critics Unhappy

Though Senator Jim Inhofe and Representative Mike Rogers, both Republicans and ranking members of the armed services committees, backed the attack, [Politico reported](#), some Democrats are unhappy about what they called a attack on a sovereign country without consulting them.

"The American people deserve to hear the Administration's rationale for these strikes and its legal justification for acting without coming to Congress," [Kaine wrote](#) in a prepared statement:

Offensive military action without congressional approval is not constitutional absent extraordinary circumstances. Congress must be fully briefed on this matter expeditiously.

Connecticut's Chris Murphy agreed. "Congress should hold this administration to the same standard it did prior administrations, and require clear legal justifications for military action, especially inside theaters like Syria, where Congress has not explicitly authorized any American military action," he said.

Another upset Democrat is Representative Ro Khanna of California, who said Biden had "absolutely no justification," the [webzine reported](#):

"This makes President Biden the seventh consecutive U.S. president to order strikes in the Middle East," Khanna lamented.

"We need to extricate from the Middle East, not escalate. The President should not be taking these actions without seeking explicit authorization instead of relying on broad, outdated [AUMFs]," Khanna said. "I spoke against endless war with Trump, and I will speak out against it when we have a Democratic President."

Paul used White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki's skepticism about President Trump's airstrike in 2017 to make the point. "I condemn meddling in Syria's civil war," he tweeted. "I also condemn attacking a sovereign nation without authority."

I condemn meddling in Syria's civil war. I also condemn attacking a sovereign nation without authority.

What authority does [@POTUS](#) have to strike Syria?

Perhaps someone should ask his [@PressSec](#) today? <https://t.co/nLxbZNLx4J>

— Senator Rand Paul (@RandPaul) [February 26, 2021](#)

Massie simply updated a Biden campaign poster:

Priorities... pic.twitter.com/rMNYr5PY7e

— Thomas Massie (@RepThomasMassie) [February 26, 2021](#)



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