



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on April 18, 2013

U.S. Sending Troops to Jordan, May Intervene in Syria

The United States is preparing for a possible military intervention in the civil war in Syria by sending American military personnel to neighboring Jordan, the *Los Angeles Times* reported. The small contingent of about 200 troops that will arrive in Jordan over the next few weeks to assist in humanitarian aid to refugees could be expanded to 20,000 or more in a rapid buildup of American forces if President Obama decides military intervention is necessary, according to unnamed “senior U.S. officials,” cited by the *Times*.



“Military intervention is always an option, but it should be an option of last resort,” Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel said in disclosing the deployment Wednesday in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee. A major deployment of U.S. forces could “embroil the U.S. in a significant, lengthy and uncertain military commitment,” he said. But citing the “humanitarian devastation” from the two-year-old civil war, Hagel said the Obama administration is looking for alternatives to seeking a negotiated settlement, while providing assistance to rebel factions that could be capable of taking control of the country after Bashar Assad’s overthrow or exile.

“It hasn’t achieved the objective, obviously,” Hagel said of efforts thus far. “That’s why we continue to look for other options and other ways to do this.”

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency is already in Jordan, running a covert program to train Syrian rebels, the *New York Times* [reported](#) last week. The agency has expanded its role in recent weeks, sending officers to Turkey to assist in the effort to get arms to the “moderate” forces in the Syrian opposition.

The first of the 200 troops are likely to arrive in Jordan this month, with the rest to arrive in May. Many of them will be civil affairs officers, trained in humanitarian assistance. They will be based at a Jordanian military installation, an official said. Plans for a possible expansion of the force to 20,000 or more include the deployment of special operations teams to find and secure Syrian chemical weapons stockpiles, U.S. air defense units to guard Jordan’s airspace, and conventional military units capable of moving into Syria.

Army General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was not optimistic when asked by committee chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.) about unintended consequences of a military intervention.

“As I sit here today, senator, I do not see the introduction of military force would produce the outcome we seek,” Dempsey said. “I don’t think it should be left unaddressed, let me be clear about that. But the introduction of military power right now certainly has the possibility of making the situation worse.”

The United States has supplied “non-lethal” aid, including communications equipment, to the rebels. U.S. officials have said they plan to send body armor and night-vision goggles. But President Obama has so far resisted calls by some members of Congress to send weapons and ammunition, to establish a “no-



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fly zone” to halt air attacks on the rebel forces, or to use U.S. troops to create a “humanitarian safe zone” in Syria.

Secretary of State John Kerry last month [confirmed](#) that the administration is supporting efforts by Middle East nations to arm the rebels and said the United States would seek assurances that the weapons go to “the right people,” and not to anti-Western extremists. The most effective fighting force in the coalitions of rebel groups at war with the Assad regime is believed to be the al Nusra Front, an al-Qaeda-affiliated organization that fought U.S. forces in Iraq.

“We had a discussion about the types of weapons that are being transferred and by whom,” Kerry said after a meeting in early March with the prime minister of Qatar, a supplier of arms to the Syrian opposition. “We did discuss the question of the ability to try to guarantee that it’s going to the right people and to the moderate Syrian opposition coalition.”

CIA officials sent to Turkey are helping in the vetting of rebels that receive arms shipments from Gulf allies, the *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#). CIA officials sent to Turkey are helping in the vetting of rebels that receive arms shipments from Gulf allies, the Wall Street Journal reported. The increased CIA activity comes at a time when the al Nursa Front is increasing its ties to al Qaeda’s central leadership in Pakistan, according to U.S. counterterrorism officials. The agency is also working with counterterrorism units in Iraq to help stem the flow of al Qaeda-linked fighters across the Iraq-Syria border. The al-Qaeda wing that calls itself the Islamic State of Iraq announced last week that it has formally united with the al-Nursa Front in Syria.

“It’s now time to declare in front of the people of the Levant and the world that al-Nusra Front is but an extension of the Islamic State of Iraq and part of it,” ISI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared in a statement posted on Islamist websites.

Dempsey testified in February that he had backed a proposal last year by then-CIA Director David Petraeus to provide U.S. arms to the rebels, a plan that also had the support of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. The White House rejected the plan and Dempsey told the Senate committee Wednesday that he is “more concerned than I was before” that the arms would end up in the hands of Islamic extremists.

Fears that al-Qaeda allies or other extremists might capture Syria’s supply of chemical weapons, or that the Assad regime may use them against the rebels, are among the reasons cited for the plans for a possible U.S. military intervention. Assad’s forces “have been moving [the stockpiles] and the number of sites is quite numerous,” Dempsey said.

The war has killed an estimated 70,000 people and more than one million have fled the fighting, according to United Nations estimates, with many now in overcrowded refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan. The stream of refugees flooding across its border with Syria is a major reason why Jordan, which has never allowed a sizable U.S. military presence in its land, has agreed to accept the small contingent of American troops and will consider accepting a larger force in the future, U.S. officials said.

While President Obama has called for Assad to resign and has encouraged the rebels seeking to overthrow the Syrian ruler, he has also expressed concern over what might follow. “I am very concerned about Syria becoming an enclave for extremism because extremists thrive in chaos, they thrive in failed states, they thrive in power vacuums,” Obama [said](#) at a recent news conference in Amman, Jordan.



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The president may have had in mind the chaos that followed the U.S.-led overthrow of Iraq, a costly reminder of the perils of adventures in “regime change.” He might also consider the possibility of calling on Jordan, Turkey, and other nations in the region to join together to deal with the chaos, rather than relying on further U.S. intervention. And while military intervention is “always an option,” as Secretary Hagel said, initiating this option is not a decision entrusted by the Constitution to the president. Obama, who conducted an air war over Libya without congressional approval in 2011, might remember, as he surveys all the chaos and crises in the world, that the Constitution has vested the decision of war or peace for this country solely in the Congress of the United States.

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