

Once anti-war Obama plans airstrikes against ISIL in Syria and Iraq

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

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President Barack Obama addresses the nation from the Cross Hall in the White House in Washington, Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2014. In a major reversal, Obama ordered the United States into a broad military campaign to “degrade and ultimately destroy” militants in two volatile Middle East nations, authorizing airstrikes inside Syria for the first time, as well as an expansion of strikes in Iraq.

WASHINGTON—Opening a new battle in the Middle East, President Barack Obama authorized U.S. airstrikes inside Syria for the first time Wednesday night. Strikes in Iraq will be expanded, he announced. Obama called it part of “a steady, relentless effort” to stop the militant group Islamic State (ISIL).

ISIL was once part of the al-Qaida terrorist group, blamed for the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. Later ISIL broke off. It has now seized large parts of Iraq and Syria. It wants to set up its own country governed by Islamic law.

The group calls itself the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and has also been called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Levant is the English term for the region stretching from southern Turkey through Syria to Egypt.

Recently, the group released videos showing the killing of two American journalists in Syria.

“We will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are,” Obama declared in a