

US plans buildup in Persian Gulf to offset Iraq withdrawal

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The Obama administration and the Pentagon are preparing for a major military buildup in the Persian Gulf to offset the troop withdrawal from Iraq and prepare for new wars in the region.

US officials, diplomats and military commanders cited by the *New York Times* in an article published Sunday indicated that the new deployments could include the stationing of combat brigades in Kuwait, across the border from Iraq and within easy striking distance of Iran, as well as “sending more naval warships through international waters to the region.”

The existence of these plans have surfaced in the wake of President Barack Obama’s October 21 announcement that all US troops occupying Iraq will be withdrawn from the country before the end of this year.

While the Obama administration and its apologists have presented this planned withdrawal as the fulfillment of the Democratic president’s campaign promises about ending the Iraq war, and even as a turn toward peace in the region, it is nothing of the kind.

In point of fact, the December 2011 withdrawal deadline was set by the Bush administration in a Status of Forces Agreement negotiated with the US-backed regime in Baghdad in 2008. Both the Bush and the Obama administration, along with their clients in Baghdad, sought to negotiate a new deal that would have allowed up to 20,000 US troops to remain in the country, classified as “trainers” and “advisers.”

These negotiations fell apart, however, over the inability of the Iraqi regime to obtain parliamentary approval for the legal immunity of US troops demanded by the Pentagon. Given the deep-going anger of the Iraqi people over the horrific war crimes committed by US forces and the loss of over one million Iraqi lives since the invasion of 2003, no major Iraqi party was prepared to identify itself with support for impunity for the American military.

Behind the scenes, negotiations continue between

Washington and the Iraqi government over maintaining US support for the Iraqi security forces.

US National Security Advisor Tom Donilon met Saturday in Washington with his Iraqi counterpart Falah al-Fayyadh to discuss how these ties will be maintained after the planned withdrawal. According to a White House statement, the two officials “reaffirmed the common vision of a broad, deep strategic partnership between the United States and Iraq as embodied in the Strategic Framework Agreement.”

The White House spokesman added that the two officials “committed to develop additional mechanisms to establish a continuous strategic dialogue between the United States and Iraq.”

Washington is by no means abandoning its bid for dominance over Iraq. It plans to leave behind a force of some 5,500 private security contractors as a mercenary army under the control of the US State Department, together with some 16,000 civilians employed by the US government and based at the largest US embassy on the planet.

And, a report released Sunday by the US Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) quotes the Iraqi military’s chief of staff, Lieutenant General Babaker Zebari, as saying that Iraqi security forces will not have the capacity to defend the country’s airspace and borders until sometime between 2020 and 2024 “without assistance from international partners.” Clearly, the implication is that the US will remain a dominant military force in Iraq, including crucially through air power, well after the withdrawal deadline.

Nonetheless, the contingency plans revealed by the *Times* Sunday signal that Washington is preparing for a far wider war in the region in the wake of any troop withdrawal from Iraq.

New targets for US aggression include both Syria and Iran. The statement made by President Barack Obama

following the grisly October 20 murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi included a thinly veiled threat that Syria was in US and NATO's sights for an exercise in regime change similar to the one they have carried out in Libya.

The seriousness with which the Syrian regime has taken these threats was reflected in an interview published Sunday by the British *Telegraph* with Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian president warned that a Western intervention in Syria would unleash an "earthquake" that would shake the region and threaten the eruption of "tens of Afghanistans."

The United Nations has estimated that as many as 3,000 Syrians have died in the unrest that has swept much of the country since last March. The Syrian government has claimed that 1,100 soldiers and police have been killed in clashes with anti-government gunmen.

Targeting Syria for aggression would represent a prelude to an even bigger war against Iran, which Washington sees as one of its main rivals for hegemony in the two strategic energy-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Having failed in two immensely bloody and costly wars over the past decade—in Afghanistan and Iraq—to secure its dominance over these regions, US imperialism has by no means given up its predatory aims. The failure of these two wars only creates a more powerful impulse for a third, against Iran.

Washington is pursuing a strategy of escalating provocations against the Iranian regime, expressed most recently in its floating of an extremely improbable "terrorist plot" that supposedly implicated Teheran in a conspiracy to contract a Mexican drug gang to kill the Saudi ambassador to the US. At the same time, US diplomats are touring Europe in an attempt to drum up support for imposing sanctions against Iran's central bank, a sweeping economic embargo that would rise to the level of an act of war.

"With an eye on the threat of a belligerent Iran, the administration is also seeking to expand military ties with the six nations in the Gulf Cooperation Council—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman," the *Times* reports. It adds that the White House and the Pentagon are "trying to foster a new 'security architecture' for the Persian Gulf that would integrate air and naval patrols and missile defense."

In other words, Washington is attempting to cobble together an anti-Iranian and counterrevolutionary military alliance based upon US collaboration with the most reactionary monarchical regimes in the region. Such a

military pact would be directed at suppressing any further uprisings by the Arab masses, as the sheikdoms of the GCC themselves carried out against the masses in Bahrain, and at providing a base for US military aggression against Iran.

According to the *Times* report, these preparations are already well advanced, with the results of negotiations on the size of the US combat forces to be deployed in Kuwait "expected in coming days."

Undoubtedly a major concern in Washington is the stability of these Gulf state allies themselves. Saudi Arabia, the linchpin of US counterrevolutionary strategy in the region, has itself been shaken by unrest in its predominantly Shi'ite oil-producing eastern province. And an unusually frank profile of the desert kingdom was posted by Al Jazeera recently, declaring that the corrupt monarchy's "octogenarian line of successors recalls the final years of the Soviet Union, when one infirm leader after another succeeded to power for a brief period of inert rule."

Also contributing to the buildup towards a new war are domestic political considerations within the US. Obama has come under fire from the Republicans over the Iraq withdrawal announcement, with Republican Senators demanding hearings on its implications. Threatening military action against Iran is no doubt seen within the right-wing leadership of the Democratic Party as an effective means of countering such criticism.

More decisive, however, are concerns over the mounting social unrest within the US, which has found its initial expression in the Occupy Wall Street protests that have broken out across the country. The American ruling elite sees a new militarist adventure as a means of diverting the escalating class conflict within America itself.



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