Obama holds security talks with Iraqi premier Maliki

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Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki travelled to Washington last week for talks with US President Barack Obama. Maliki asked Obama to supply his regime with a military and security package, including advanced weapons systems such as Apache helicopter gunships, unmanned aerial drones, and F-16s jets, as well as intelligence and counterterrorism advisers.

The purpose of Maliki and Obama's meeting was to discuss ramping up of US military support to Iraq amid rising sectarian violence spreading from the US-led proxy war in neighboring Syria. In defiance of public opinion, the US is preparing for renewed military operations in Iraq, ten years after the first invasion and two years after the official withdrawal of US forces.

While the Iraqi premier sought extensive heavy weaponry, the US has declined this proposal, at least publicly. Nevertheless, Washington is preparing an armaments package worth approximately $4.7 billion for sale to Iraq, and is intensifying other forms of support for the Iraqi regime.

There are obviously significant tensions between Washington and Baghdad. Speaking to Reuters, Republican Senator Bob Corker said, "I don't think [Maliki] seemed to internalize the concerns that we have about what's happening there ... and I don't think it was a particularly healthy meeting."

Top US officials are worried that arming Maliki, who heads a Shiite government sympathetic to Iran, will bolster Iran's strategic position in the region. "It almost seems like after all the blood we lost and all the money we spent, that Iran seems to have more influence in Iraq than the United States does," Democratic Representative Eliot Engel said in response to the meeting.

The US and Turkey also fear that transfer of advanced weapons systems would strengthen Maliki vis-à-vis Kurdish forces in northern Iraq, who are making their own energy deals with the US-allied regime in Ankara and have provided key intelligence to the United States and Israel.

This comes amid rising tensions over the distribution of oil money between the Kurdish enclaves and Iraq's federal government in Baghdad. Minister of Natural Resources for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Ashti Hawrami spoke at an energy conference in Istanbul this week about the need the KRG's plans to export oil to Turkey independently from Baghdad.

"If the Baghdad government refuses our rights that are mentioned in the permanent constitution, we will resort to an alternative plan that exports the region's oil and deducts the dues of companies operating there from our returns," he said.

As Maliki himself has stated, sectarian violence inside Iraq is reaching "genocidal" levels. Over 6,000 Iraqis have been killed so far this year and 600 in October alone. Attacks against civilian targets including schools, wedding parties, and markets occur on a daily basis.

The sectarian and political violence raging inside Iraq today is the legacy of the more than two decades of systematic destruction waged against that country by US imperialism—including multiple bombing campaigns, a decade of economic sanctions, and full-scale ground invasion and occupation—and particularly the US stoking of a sectarian war in Syria.

"The Iraqi government needs security help because the security situation is hell," Mostafa Kadhimi, an analyst in Baghdad, told the *Financial Times*. "They need technical experience and support for security operations. Iraq believes that the security situation is being driven by what is going on, on the ground in Syria."

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US imperialism and the Obama administration now face the consequences of their reactionary policies, including support and arming of Al Qaeda in Syria, which has flooded groups in Iraq affiliated with Syrian Al Qaeda forces with resources.

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its affiliates have been heavily armed by the US and have waged war against the Syria regime, which the Obama administration intended to attack in September. Obama postponed a war, however, in the face of popular disapproval and escalating divisions in the US foreign policy establishment. This has not stopped Sunni forces linked to Al Qaeda in Iraq from waging war against Maliki's regime, which was set up by Washington.

Brian Katulis of Center for American Progress told the *New York Times* that it is preparing for an expanded intervention into the military and security situation in Iraq. "There's recognition [in Washington] that if Syria continues on current trends, you're going to need to be more involved in Iraq," Katulis said.

In an interview with *Defense One*, Ryan Crocker, former US Ambassador to Iraq and dean of the George Bush school of Government & Public Service at Texas A&M University, made the case for stepped up US intervention in Iraq.

"If a way is not found to stem the violence we're now seeing, Iraq will reach a breaking point. That would have very severe consequences for Iraq and the region," he said. "You may think Syria is pretty bad right now, but believe me, it can get a lot worse…We could very well have the whole Middle East blow up in our face."

During the occupation of Iraq, the US fomented and manipulated sectarian divisions, operating CIA-run death squads, as it sought to insure the subservience of the regime to US imperialism. This "Sunni Awakening" counter-insurgency strategy is being cited as the model for the proposed renewal of US military intervention in Iraq.

A PBS report, "What is al-Qaida in Iraq? A CFR Background Briefing," published Wednesday, stated: "Washington has responded to al-Qaida's resurgence in the region by increasing the CIA's support for the Maliki government, including assistance to elite counterterrorism units that report directly to the prime minister."

Commenting on Maliki's visit, President Obama claimed that cooperation with Maliki is crucial to the "war on terror". "Unfortunately Al Qaeda has still been active and has grown more active recently," Obama said. "We had a lot of discussion about how we can work together to push back against that terrorist organization that operates not only in Iraq, but also poses a threat to the entire region and to the United States."

Obama's claims that his administration bases its policy on fighting terrorism are absurd lies. The "rebel" forces fighting on behalf of US imperialism against the Assad regime in Syria are integrated and led by Islamist reactionaries, like the Al Nusra Front, who are affiliated with al Qaeda.

The US has been pouring money and weapons into the hands of these groups, through direct and indirect methods, since the war began in 2011. These extremist militias are receiving financial and operational support from US imperialism and its regional allies.

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