

Obama orders nearly 300 US troops to Iraq

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President Barack Obama has informed the US Congress under the War Powers Act that he is ordering at least 275 US soldiers and Marines deployed to Iraq as the country descends into a full-fledged civil war.

The troops are ostensibly being sent to protect the giant US embassy in Baghdad and assist in a possible emergency evacuation of thousands of American functionaries stationed there. The administration already ordered a partial evacuation sending thousands of officials to other parts of Iraq and the region.

There is already a sizable Marine contingent at the embassy, not to mention large numbers of heavily armed military contractors, making it highly likely that the troops are being deployed for other purposes. This includes organizing a defense of the Iraqi capital under conditions in which Iraqi government security forces have repeatedly collapsed in the face of an onslaught by Islamist fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other Sunni insurgents.

Washington has insisted that the forces it is sending in are not combat troops, while acknowledging that they are nonetheless “equipped for combat.”

Meanwhile, the White House has organized a meeting with the top Democratic and Republican leaders of both the House and Senate today for consultations on Iraq. The private meeting between Obama and House Speaker John Boehner (Republican-Ohio), Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Democrat-California), Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (Democrat-Nevada) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (Republican-Kentucky) is likely in preparation for a more aggressive US intervention.

Despite ruling out any US “boots on the ground,” there is increasing discussion of dispatching Special Forces units to Iraq—who again would be equipped for combat but would not be “combat troops” by Washington’s definition.

“The White House is considering sending a small number of American Special Forces soldiers to Iraq in an apparent attempt to help the government in Baghdad slow the nation’s rampant Sunni insurgency,” the Associated

Press reported, citing unnamed US officials familiar with the discussion. One of the officials said that the proposal would involve up to 100 Special Forces troops.

The Obama administration has repeatedly touted as its greatest foreign policy achievement the final withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in December 2011. The pullout was conducted on the timetable set by the previous administration of George W. Bush and finalized only because of Washington’s failure to secure a status of forces agreement guaranteeing US troops immunity from prosecution for war crimes. Now, two and a half years later, a civil war that stems wholly from US imperialism’s destruction of Iraqi society and its interventions elsewhere in the Middle East is prompting it to send troops back in and contemplate fresh violence against the shattered country.

The White House and the Pentagon are also considering launching drone missile strikes and other air strikes against the insurgents. The Obama administration has already ordered the aircraft carrier George H.W. Bush and five other warships into position in the Persian Gulf for a possible attack on Iraq.

An indication of the thinking in circles close to the administration came in a report released Tuesday by the Center for American Progress, a Washington think-tank. The group is headed by Neera Tanden, who was the domestic policy director for the Obama campaign, and includes a number of other prominent Democrats, including former Clinton White House chief of staff John Podesta and ex-Treasury Secretary Larry Summers.

“In Iraq, the United States should prepare for limited use of US—and if possible allied—air power on ISIS targets to degrade their ability to further destabilize the country and to protect US interests,” the report states.

It likewise urges “more robust efforts to train and equip” the so-called “moderate” Sunni Islamist insurgents in Syria combined with “limited air strikes” in that country as well.

Since last week’s fall of Iraq’s second largest city, Mosul, the situation has continued to deteriorate for the

US-backed regime of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Heavy fighting was reported Tuesday for control of the city of Baquba, less than 40 miles north of the capital, Baghdad. Insurgents also overran Tal Afar, a strategic city in northwestern Iraq near the border with Syria, where ISIS is one of the main fighting forces in the US-backed war for regime change against President Bashar al-Assad.

The fighting in Baquba brought another indication of the growing threat of a sectarian-based civil war erupting even more explosively than the one triggered by the US occupation in 2006.

Shiite militiamen defending the city's jail against Sunni forces are reported to have carried out the mass execution of some 42 prisoners, who were said to be Sunnis, arrested on suspicion of supporting the insurgency. The massacre follows a number of earlier reports of the ISIS executing large numbers of captured troops and police, particularly in the city of Tikrit.

There have also been reports from Baghdad of apparent sectarian revenge assassinations of Sunnis by Shiite gunmen. The bodies of a Sunni prayer leader and two of his assistants were found in a Baghdad morgue Tuesday, four days after they were reportedly kidnapped by militiamen. Four more bodies, presumed to be those of Sunnis, were found with multiple gunshot wounds on Tuesday, and there were reports that Sunnis living in Baghdad are having x's scrawled on their homes, a warning that they must leave or die.

The Obama administration, according to the *Washington Post*, is pressuring Prime Minister Maliki to shift from the Shiite sectarian policy that he has pursued over the past eight years and adopt "a more inclusive power-sharing arrangement" that would draw in Sunni and Kurdish elements.

In an apparent response to the pressure from Washington, Maliki appeared Tuesday beside a Sunni politician, Usama al-Nujaifi, who was speaker of the Iraqi parliament before it was dissolved recently, and the former prime minister, Ibrahim al-Jafaari, in a call for national unity and for "defending the state and protecting its sovereignty and dignity." Iraqi observers recalled that a similar statement was issued during the sectarian bloodbath of 2006, with no discernible effect.

Behind all of the hysteria generated about the ISIS establishing a terrorist base in Iraq, the reality is that the relatively small number of radical Islamists have been able to advance across the so-called Sunni triangle of northwestern Iraq only because they have been joined by a popular Sunni insurgency, led in many cases by former

officers in the Iraqi army that was disbanded by Washington after it toppled the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. The insurgency is driven by bitter resentment over the systematic exclusion of Iraq's Sunni population from political power and the use of the security forces to violently suppress peaceful protests.

This policy has been pursued by Maliki since he was first installed as prime minister under the US occupation in 2006 and then re-elected in 2010, thanks in large measure to the Obama administration's pressure to deny the office to the largely secular Iraqi National Movement, which gained the most votes.

Now there are signs that the Obama administration may be maneuvering to push Maliki aside and bring in a new US puppet ruler. Asked Monday whether US Secretary of State John Kerry believed that Maliki should not be the country's prime minister, a State Department spokeswoman said, "He leaves it in the hands of the Iraqi people, so we'll see what happens."

US imperialism has been the principal instigator of sectarianism in the region, from its divide-and-conquer strategy in the war and occupation in Iraq, to the fomenting of sectarian civil war to topple Assad in Syria. Its cynical support for Sunni Islamist insurgents in Syria, while backing a Shiite sectarian regime across the border in Iraq to suppress these very same forces, has brought the entire Middle East to what a United Nations panel on Syria warned Tuesday was the "cusp of a regional war."

This assessment was borne out Monday in Maliki's bitter denunciation of Saudi Arabia and other US allies among the Persian Gulf monarchies for funding and supporting the ISIS.

On the other hand, the former Qatari ambassador to the US, Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad al-Khalifa, a prominent member of the ruling family in Qatar, the home of the US Central Command, warned on his twitter account that "Any intervention in Iraq by the west to prop up criminal Malki in Iraq will be seen by the whole Sunni Arabs and Muslims as war against them."

Khalifa went on to state, "It is wise for the west to stay clear of Iraq by not intervening unless they can help force Malki out of power and keep Iran out of Iraq."



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