

Obama exploits Iraq crisis as pretext for war against Syria

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The Obama administration is utilizing the crisis in Iraq as an opportunity to escalate the US war drive throughout the Middle East, with Syria in the crosshairs.

On Thursday, President Obama held an afternoon press conference in which he announced that the US would send 300 military advisers to Iraq as part of a military deployment that includes plans for a bombing campaign ostensibly targeting an insurgency led by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Following this announcement, a conference call was held with three unnamed administration officials. When a reporter asked whether US attacks on ISIS would be limited to Iraq, given that ISIS operates on both sides of the Iraq-Syria border and controls significant territory in eastern Syria, one official responded that “we don’t restrict potential US action to a specific geographic space.”

“The president has made clear time and again that we will take action as necessary including direct US military action if it’s necessary to defend the United States against an imminent threat,” the official added. ISIS “operates broadly, and we would not restrict our ability to take action that is necessary to protect the United States.” The official also included “our homeland” among the regions threatened by ISIS.

Citing “senior administration officials,” the *Washington Post* reported that the administration “has begun to consider the conflicts in Syria and Iraq as a single challenge.” The situation in Iraq could “force the administration to reconsider its calculations in Syria”—including military strikes and more advanced weaponry to the US-backed opposition.

As the WSWS warned, the American ruling class has “no shortage of foul and bloody tricks up its sleeve” in response to the debacle in Iraq, a debacle created by a

brutal and bloody war and occupation. The US is now seizing on the crisis it created to reverse its failure to launch air strikes against Syria last August, a retreat now widely viewed as disastrous within US ruling circles.

The diplomatic and military shift to target Syria was prepared the day before Obama’s press conference in an op-ed column published Wednesday in the *New York Times*, written by Anne-Marie Slaughter, a leading member of the Democratic foreign policy establishment who served as director of policy planning for the State Department under Hillary Clinton from 2009 to 2011.

Slaughter’s commentary criticizes Obama’s failure to act in Syria. “Why is the threat of ISIS in Iraq a sufficiently vital interest, but not the rise of ISIS in Syria?” Slaughter asks, before concluding, “The answer … may well involve the use of force on a limited but immediate basis, in both countries.”

Slaughter’s former boss, Hillary Clinton, has in recent days given a number of interviews in which she states that she favored bombing Syria, a position that she also outlines in her newly published memoir.

With no public discussion, and in the face of widespread popular opposition, the Obama administration is now preparing to drag the country into an open-ended conflict that threatens to engulf the entire Middle East, involving Syria, Iran, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies.

Nor is the conflict confined to the Middle East. The war drive against Syria is inextricably tied to the US and European-backed campaign against Russia, a major Syrian ally. Opposition from Russia was a significant factor in the decision by the Obama administration to temporarily pull back from war against Syria last year. This was followed by the operation in Ukraine to

unseat a pro-Russian government and provoke a confrontation with Russia itself.

In its reckless war fever, the foreign policy of the United States is riven by contradictions. While the operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan are supposedly aimed at targeting Islamic militants, the US and its allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar have in fact financed these forces—including ISIS—as part of the campaign against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. While the ISIS-led insurgency in Iraq is the pretext for bombing Syria, it is in fact the Syrian government, not ISIS, that would be the target.

Moreover, the civil war in Syria is a direct consequence of the civil war in neighboring Iraq deliberately instigated by the US occupation regime, which sought to crush resistance in the Sunni community by encouraging Kurdish separatism and mobilizing Shiite militias in a war of extermination in 2006-2007.

After deliberately fomenting sectarian conflict, the US is now denouncing the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki for failing to unite the ethnicities and religions of Iraq.

The crisis in Iraq is also seen as an opportunity to effect a certain restructuring of Iraqi politics, in particular by removing Maliki. At Thursday's press conference, Obama confined himself to pro forma declarations that it was up to the Iraqi people, not the US government, to decide who should govern Iraq. But the *Wall Street Journal* reported Thursday that the administration "is signaling that it wants a new government in Iraq without Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki."

The fact is, Maliki was installed in office after the US military conquered Iraq, and he was a puppet of the occupation regime. Should Washington decide he has become too much of an obstacle, Maliki will be terminated as soon as a suitable replacement can be found.

All of this is being carried out in complete violation of international law. At Thursday's press conference, not a single reporter thought to ask Obama what was the legal justification for the announced troop deployments. It is the position of the Obama administration that the president has the right to wage war against anyone, anywhere, without even the pretense of a congressional, let alone popular, mandate.

Obama met with the top congressional leaders of both parties at the White House Wednesday, and according to press reports, none raised any constitutional objection to US military intervention in Iraq or the broader Middle East.

"We had a good discussion," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican, said, adding that Obama "indicated he didn't feel he had any need for authority from us for steps that he might take." House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, added that she did "not believe the president needs any further legislative authority to pursue the particular options for increased security assistance discussed today."

The vast majority of the American people oppose any reentry of US military forces into the cauldron of Iraq, let alone US intervention in Syria, but this intense antiwar feeling finds no expression within the US political establishment and its twin parties of imperialist war.



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