

Washington escalates intervention in region-wide Middle East war

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21 June 2014

With nearly 600 Green Beret “advisors” and other US troops in or set to be sent to Iraq over the coming days, the Pentagon announced Friday that it is negotiating rules of engagement that the regime in Baghdad rejected two-and-a-half years ago, before the final pullout of the American military.

Key among these provisions, according to Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby, is blanket immunity from Iraqi or international law relating to the slaying of Iraqi civilians or other war crimes.

It was the refusal of the government headed by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to accept such provisions in 2011 that scuttled negotiations on a status of forces agreement that would have kept some 10,000 US troops indefinitely deployed at a number of strategic Iraqi bases.

The Pentagon spokesman attempted to deflect suggestions that the Obama administration is exploiting the debacle in Iraq to blackmail the teetering regime headed by Maliki into submitting to US terms, thus paving the way for the permanent bases that Washington initially sought.

“What we were talking post-2011 was a fairly sizable force of American troops that would remain in Iraq for a long period of time,” Kirby said. “What we are talking about here is a very small number, up to 300, whose mission will be of a limited duration.”

Anyone familiar with the history of the period leading up to the US war in Vietnam, however, knows full well that the dispatch of “advisors” to a war-torn country in Washington’s crosshairs can quickly lead to the deployment of a very “sizable force of American troops.”

There is every reason to suspect that President Barack Obama, who won his first election to the US presidency by posturing as an opponent of the Iraq war, is heading

down just such a path.

In his statement delivered at the White House on Thursday, Obama attempted to sell the renewed deployment of US forces in Iraq as part of Washington’s global war on terrorism—he repeated the words “terrorism” or “terrorist” 10 times in the short briefing. In reality, however, the US ruling establishment’s response to the collapse of the US-trained Iraqi military in the face of a broad-based insurgency by Iraq’s Sunni minority is directed at pursuing far broader aims, both regionally and globally.

While claiming that the advances made by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in northern and western Iraq pose an eventual threat of terrorist attacks on the “homeland,” Obama added that Washington had “strategic interests in stability in the region.”

Spelling these out, he added that “obviously issues like energy and global energy markets continues [sic] to be important.”

In other words, the latest intervention—like the catastrophic nearly nine-year-long war and occupation that preceded it—is ultimately about oil and who controls this strategic resource.

It was to establish American imperialist hegemony over the oil reserves of the Persian Gulf that Washington launched its war based on lies in March 2003, killing upwards of a million Iraqis and sacrificing the lives of some US 4,500 troops in the process. US imperialism has never given up on this goal, even while forced to pursue it by other means.

Even as Obama was speaking, the Islamist insurgents were overrunning Iraq’s largest oil refinery in Beiji, 155 miles north of Baghdad. The loss of the facility, which is directed to domestic consumption, spells gasoline and power shortages for the embattled country.

The US intervention in Iraq is part of a broader

intervention into a developing region-wide war that has been ignited by a succession of American military operations, ranging from the invasion of Iraq in 2003 to the use of Islamist militias as proxy forces in the 2011 US-NATO war for regime-change in Libya and the instigation and support of the ongoing sectarian civil war in Syria by Washington and its allies, including Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni Persian Gulf monarchies.

Even as ISIS fighters were encircling the last holdouts among the government troops at the Beiji refinery Friday, the Syrian government reported a terrorist car bombing in the central city of Hama, which killed at least 34 and wounded some 50 more. The Al-Nusra front, an Al Qaeda affiliate that has clashed with ISIS for control of turf in Syria, claimed responsibility for the atrocity.

Meanwhile, in Lebanon, another suicide bomber, apparently linked to ISIS, attacked a checkpoint in the Beqaa Valley, killing two people and wounding dozens. The apparent target of the bombing was Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, a Shiite official who is director of Lebanon's General Security Directorate. On the same day in Beirut, police rounded up 20 members of ISIS who were suspected of preparing further assassination attempts.

While claiming that its intervention in Iraq is meant to quash ISIS, the reality is that this Islamist militia is Washington's own Frankenstein's monster. It was forged first through the US military destruction of Iraqi society and the divide-and-rule strategy of the American occupation that fueled the bitter sectarian bloodbath that wracked the country. While suppressed in Iraq, this tendency had a dramatic resurgence in Syria as the US, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other regimes in the region funneled arms and other support to the Islamist-dominated "rebels" carrying out the sectarian war for regime-change against the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Last September, the Obama administration was forced—in the face of massive popular opposition—to back down from its plan to carry out US air strikes against the Assad regime and in support of ISIS and other Islamist formations. Now it is preparing to reverse this humiliating climbdown on the pretext of pursuing ISIS both in Iraq and across the border in Syria.

US officials *Was speaking* to the Thursday said that the administration sees Iraq and Syria as "a single challenge." Under the pretext of fighting terrorism, such an intervention will be directed primarily at furthering the drive to topple the Assad government.

This position received support Thursday from Senator John McCain, a prominent critic of Obama's Iraq policy, who stated his agreement that "we are going to have to act in Syria as well."

Also noteworthy in terms of support was a statement issued following Obama's press conference by Anthony Cordesman, a military strategist for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who has advised the Pentagon on the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"The President's decision to send 300 more US military advisors to Iraq is a key first step in dealing with the crisis," Cordesman wrote. "It ensures that the United States as well as Iran will have a presence on the ground, while any US use of airpower alone would have effectively empowered Iran's Revolutionary Guards because they would have been present with Iraqi forces."

This points to another major strategic aim in the Iraq intervention, which is to weaken Iranian influence in the country as part of an overarching strategy of subduing every power that poses an impediment to US imperialism's drive for global hegemony. This undoubtedly is a primary consideration as well in the ever more open campaign by Washington to oust Maliki—who was originally put in office by the US occupation—and replace him with a more pliant regime that will align itself with Washington against Tehran.

Thus, for all Obama's talk about taking "targeted and precise military action," the reality is that US imperialism is once again embarking on an aggressive policy that has the potential to ignite a regional and even world war.



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