

# US moves inciting sectarian warfare throughout the Middle East

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The Obama administration is responding to the uprising in Iraq led by the Sunni extremist Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) with intrigues and provocations that can lead only to yet more death and destruction in both Iraq and Syria, and risk triggering open war with Iran.

The weekend visit of Secretary of State John Kerry to Egypt, to embrace the dictatorship of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, effectively scuttled the tentative move by the White House toward a rapprochement with the regime in Tehran. Washington is instead pursuing an agenda in the Middle East that dovetails with the interests of Israel, the ruling elite and military in Egypt, and the reactionary Sunni monarchies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. It will rest upon these forces, its traditional allies in imposing its imperialist dictates throughout the region, to try and salvage its position in the Middle East.

Since Friday, both Kerry and President Obama have left no doubt that Washington is conspiring to oust Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, an Iranian-supported Shiite fundamentalist politician who took office in 2006 with Washington's backing. The American political and media establishment is blaming Maliki for the religious and ethnic conflicts that US imperialism consciously fomented in Iraq to secure its grip over the country. Over one million Iraqis lost their lives due to the US military repression and sectarian bloodshed that consolidated the position of the Shiite-dominated government that Maliki heads.

On Friday, Obama attempted to rewrite history, telling CNN: "We gave Iraq a chance to have an inclusive democracy, to work across sectarian lines to provide a better future for their children, and unfortunately what we've seen is a breakdown of trust... Part of the task now is to see whether Iraqi leaders are

prepared to rise above sectarian motivations, come together, compromise. If they can't, there's not going to be a military solution to this problem... There's no amount of American firepower that's going to be able to hold the country together and I've made that very clear to Mr. Maliki and all the other leadership inside Iraq... They don't have a lot of time."

On Sunday, Kerry declared: "The United States would like the Iraqi people to find leadership that is prepared to represent all of the people of Iraq, that is prepared to be inclusive and share power." The US, he went on, "was not responsible for what happened in Libya and nor is it responsible for what is happening in Iraq today."

The messages from the Obama administration are both incendiary and politically incoherent. According to Washington, the Shiite ruling elite that it elevated into power must make a "compromise" with the forces that have aligned with ISIS over recent weeks to rebel against Baghdad and carve out control over large areas of the country. It must make a deal with their Sunni-based rivals, who have been marginalised both during and following the US occupation.

The power-sharing arrangement that Washington is demanding, however, amounts to the de-facto partition of the country through the establishment of autonomous zones in the Sunni-populated areas, modelled on the Kurdish Regional Government that rules over the three majority-Kurdish provinces.

Maliki's removal would be aimed at establishing a government that not only gives a blanket endorsement to Obama's plans for revived US military operations in the country, but also allows the US, Egypt and the Gulf states to arm, supply and provide safe havens inside Iraq to the Sunni-based rebels that are seeking the overthrow of the Iranian-backed Syrian government of

President Bashar al-Assad.

Kerry declared on Sunday that the US is “discouraging any kind of support to entities where it is unsure where the money is going... and that goes to any government, any charity, or any individual.” The truth, however, is that the proxy war fought on behalf of the US and European powers to overthrow Assad created the conditions in which ISIS gained adherents, weapons and resources. The militants who have seized Iraqi cities and towns were assembled and equipped in Syria. From the beginnings of the Syrian civil war, Sunni extremists have been the main component of the forces fighting Assad’s military.

Over the weekend, ISIS fighters took control of the border crossing between Iraq and Syria in the town of Al Qaim, along with several other towns along the Euphrates River, to facilitate even closer integration of its operations on either side of the border. From the cities they control in western Iraq such as Fallujah, ISIS fighters have now penetrated as close to Baghdad as the outer suburb of Abu Ghraib. In Syria, they are launching new offensives, using vehicles and weapons captured from US-equipped Iraqi army units.

As the trajectory of the US response to the debacle it faces in Iraq began to emerge over the weekend, the leading representatives of the Iranian regime issued bitter condemnations. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told Iranian news: “We are strongly opposed to US and other intervention in Iraq. We don’t approve of it as we believe the Iraqi government, nation and religious authorities are capable of ending the sedition.”

The US, Khamenei declared, “is seeking an Iraq under its hegemony and ruled by its stooges.”

Iranian president Hassan Rohani denounced, without naming them, the ruling elites of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states for financing Sunni extremism in Syria, Iraq and throughout the region. “Those who spend their money and oil dollars to help terrorists today,” he stated, “know that tomorrow is your turn... Stop it. Stop the bloodshed.”

To comply with Obama’s policies in regards to both Iraq and Syria, an administration in Baghdad would have to appeal for US military support to carry out bloody purges against the Shiite factions that are linked with Tehran, sympathetic to Assad in Syria, and exert enormous sway within the Iraqi military, state bureaucracy and major Shiite population centres. On

Saturday, one of the largest, the movement led by cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, paraded tens of thousands of its Mehdi Army militiamen through the streets of Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, Amarah, Basra and other majority Shiite cities. Even in Kirkuk, the northern oil city that was occupied by Kurdish troops to prevent ISIS entering it, Sadrist militiamen marched in a show in strength.

The Shiite militia mobilisation centred on pledges to defend various Shiite shrines that ISIS has threatened to destroy, but anti-US slogans were also prominent in the demonstrations. In the early stages of the occupation, Sadr called for resistance, with the Mehdi Army actively supporting Sunni insurgents and ultimately fighting a series of pitched battles with American troops in 2004. After Sadr’s movement made a political agreement to support and participate in a Shiite-dominated puppet government, more radical offshoots continued to wage guerrilla war over the following years, allegedly with the assistance of the Iranian military.

The inexorable logic of the developing situation, a confrontation with Shiite forces inside Iraq and with Iran by the US and its regional allies, was openly advocated yesterday by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Speaking on US television, he labelled both ISIS and Iran as “enemies of the United States.” Advising Obama, Netanyahu declared: “There are two actions you have to take: one is to take the actions that you deem necessary to counter this ISIS takeover of Iraq, and the second is not to allow Iran to dominate Iraq the way it dominated Lebanon and Syria.”



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