

Obama claims “progress” in Iraq intervention

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President Barack Obama Monday claimed a “major step forward” in the ongoing US military intervention in Iraq, announcing that Kurdish and Iraqi government forces backed by intense US airstrikes had succeeded in wresting the Mosul dam, the country’s largest, from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), whose fighters captured the facility 11 days earlier.

Speaking late Monday afternoon during a brief return to Washington from his vacation in Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, Obama claimed that the operation to recapture the dam fell within the announced objectives—“protecting US personnel and facilities” in the country and carrying out humanitarian operations—for what is rapidly shaping up as the third US war in Iraq.

He suggested that ISIS, which over the past two months has overrun large swathes of northwestern Iraq, including Mosul, a city of 1.5 million, could destroy the dam, sending a wave of water nearly 250 miles south along the Tigris River to Baghdad and potentially flooding the US embassy. This rather improbable scenario ignores the obvious fact that the water would first hit—with far greater force—the city of Mosul, which ISIS occupies, moving on to Tikrit, which is also under the control of ISIS and other Sunni insurgents.

However, from a strategic standpoint, retaking the dam would be advisable in advance of a far bloodier campaign to seize back Mosul from the Islamist fighters.

Iraqi government spokesmen had claimed that the dam had been retaken earlier in the day, even as eyewitnesses at the scene were reporting continued fighting by ISIS forces still holding parts of the facility. It was later reported that Iraqi special forces units and Kurdish fighters, who appeared to have borne the brunt of the combat, were obliged to move slowly because of explosive devices left by the Islamists as they retreated.

The struggle for the dam saw the most intense

airstrikes since Obama announced the new US intervention on August 7. On Monday, according to the US Central Command, US fighter jets, bombers and unmanned drones carried out 15 strikes near the dam. This followed 25 other strikes over the weekend.

Late Sunday, acting in what the administration claimed was compliance with the War Powers Resolution, Obama issued a report to Congress announcing that the US intervention had been extended from the purported purposes of protecting US personnel and “humanitarian” objectives to the retaking of the Mosul dam.

The 1973 resolution, passed in the wake of the US war in Vietnam, requires the president to seek congressional authorization within 60 days of sending US military personnel into hostilities. Successive US presidents, including Obama, have treated the requirement with contempt, and even Congress, as recently as the US-NATO war for regime-change in Libya, has backed away from attempts to enforce it.

Obama’s statement claimed that the operations were “limited in their nature, duration, and scope and are being undertaken in coordination with and at the request of the Government of Iraq.” The White House, however, has refused to predict how long the operation will last, though Obama himself has spoken of “months.”

“At this point, it would be speculative to discuss how the 60-day provision in the War Powers Resolution would apply,” a senior administration official told the *Wall Street Journal* last week. “The administration will continue to consult with Congress during the course of the 60 days.”

Asked at his appearance before the press Monday about “mission creep” in Iraq, Obama insisted that his administration was “not introducing thousands of US troops on the ground to wage combat.” This careful selection of words suggests that a major escalation in

the American intervention is precisely what is taking place.

US officials have regularly employed the term “combat troops” to refer to the deployment of full combat brigades. Insisting that they will not be reintroduced, therefore, does not preclude sending in thousands of US special operations troops to carry out “anti-terrorist” operations, or deploying “advisors” and “trainers” to direct Iraqi government forces. There are already some 900 US military personnel on the ground in Iraq, along with thousands of military contractors.

Obama stressed in his Monday statement to the media the importance of Washington’s efforts to reshape the regime in Baghdad according to US requirements. While the administration hailed last week’s forcing out of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who was installed by the US occupation in 2006, and his replacement with a fellow member of the Shi’ite religious Da’wa party, Haidar al-Abadi, Obama insisted Monday that the new prime minister-designate must speedily form a “credible united government” to serve as a partner with Washington in a “joint counter-terrorism strategy.”

Up until now, Washington’s intervention has rested much more heavily on the coordination of attacks with Kurdish separatist forces than on any joint strategy with the government in Baghdad.

As the *Wall Street Journal* made clear in an article published Monday, US operations are dependent upon “a controversial new ally: fighters from a Kurdish guerrilla force that Washington considers a terror organization.” The reference was to the PKK, or Kurdistan Workers Party, which has waged a 30-year war for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey and has more recently organized the defense of Kurdish areas in Syria against the US-backed Sunni Islamist “rebels” seeking the overthrow of the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

According to the *Journal* report, PKK commanders recounted meeting with US military advisers who were dropped on Mount Sinjar last week and having “constructive discussions.” The PKK units, battle-hardened by the struggles with ISIS and other Islamist “rebels” in Syria, proved decisive in reversing the retreat by the Iraqi Kurdish militia, known as the Peshmerga.

The dizzying lineup of the US with diametrically opposed forces on either side of the Iraqi-Syrian border

only underscores the fraud of the so-called “war on terror” and exposes the underlying predatory imperialist interests that drive Washington’s policy in the region.



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