

Obama envisions “circumstances” requiring US ground troops in Iraq

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“There are always circumstances in which the United States might need to deploy ground troops” in Iraq, President Barack Obama declared at a news conference held in conjunction with the close of the G20 summit and the wrapping up of his week-long trip to Asia and Australia.

The remark was made in response to questions concerning last week’s **comment** by US Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that the Pentagon is “certainly considering” such a deployment.

It represented a further walking back of the US president’s pledge last September that there would be no deployment of American ground troops in the new Middle East war that has included a three-month bombing campaign in both Iraq and Syria and the doubling of the number of US “advisers” in Iraq to over 3,000.

Obama chose as a hypothetical situation requiring ground troops a scenario in which the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria had “gotten possession of a nuclear weapon.” In such a situation, he said, “Not only would Chairman Dempsey recommend me sending US ground troops to get that weapon out of their hands, but I would order it.”

He went on, however, to suggest that any number of other situations could also prompt the US to send in combat troops. “So the question just ends up being, what are those circumstances? I’m not going to speculate on those,” he said.

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel spoke along similar lines after appearing at a national defense forum held at the Reagan Library in California. While vowing there that no “combat troops” would be deployed in Iraq, Hagel acknowledged in a subsequent press conference at Fort Irwin, California that special operations troops in Iraq had been given “missions

working with the Iraqi security forces in Anbar province,” the predominantly Sunni region that has been largely overrun by ISIS.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that direct participation of US troops in combat in Iraq is not a matter of “if,” but “when.” Initially, the Obama administration appears set on maintaining the fiction that special operations units and “advisers” do not constitute “combat troops” even when they engage in combat.

Speaking alongside Hagel at the forum were his two predecessors, Robert Gates and Leon Panetta, both of whom criticized the administration for ruling out ground troops. Senator John McCain, who is slated to head the Senate Armed Services Committee in the upcoming Congress, also participated, sharply criticizing the administration along similar lines.

Dempsey had been scheduled to speak at the same forum, but was absent due to his trip to Iraq, his first since the US launched its war over three months ago.

Speaking to audiences of US troops over the weekend, Dempsey said the Pentagon was speeding up its training and advising operation in Iraq. “What we are asking you to do is work by, with and through the Iraqis to get the job done,” he said.

In his remarks before Congress last week, Dempsey was clear that US troops would be called for if Washington’s “assumptions” about the war were “rendered invalid.”

These assumptions include the ability of the US to train and field an Iraqi army capable of driving ISIS out of the third of the country’s territory it has seized from the government. Given the spectacular failure of the same Iraqi army—trained by the Pentagon over years and at the cost of some \$25 billion—this is hardly a given.

Secondly, it is assumed that the ouster of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki—who was himself installed by Washington—and the imposition of a new prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, will lead to an “inclusive government” that the country’s Sunni minority will be willing to support against ISIS. This is also far from clear. According to the Reuters press agency, “The Baghdad government appears to be doing little to assimilate Sunnis in any much-needed move toward unity.”

The Reuters report describes how the government has denied weapons to Sunni tribes opposed to ISIS, while it continues to rely heavily on Shia sectarian militias that have carried out attacks on Sunni populations, deepening hatred for the regime in Baghdad.

Finally, the supposed US strategy relies on the arming and training of so-called moderate rebels inside Syria to oppose ISIS forces there and eventually overthrow the government of President Bashar al-Assad. That element of the strategy has also failed spectacularly, with the so-called “moderates” being overrun by the combined forces of ISIS and the Al Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda affiliate that was previously allied with the US-backed “moderates,” with large stocks of Western-supplied weapons being lost in the bargain.

The drumbeat for sending US and allied Western troops into combat continues to grow from various sources. Speaking in a radio interview Sunday, L. Paul Bremer, who headed the US Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad in the wake of the 2003 US invasion, said that “every military expert you talk to—including those who are in service today—says we’re going to need American combat forces on the ground.”

Bremer stated that in addition to a more extensive US bombing campaign, some 10,000 to 12,000 US ground troops would be needed. “The problem isn’t so much the number, it’s what’s their mission?,” the ex-US proconsul said. “They have to have the mission, as they had when we did the surge in Iraq that defeated Al Qaeda in Iraq.”

Along similar lines, Gen. Richard Dannatt, who was chief of the general staff of the British military during the last US-led war and occupation in Iraq, told Sky News that a bombing campaign was not enough and that Western powers “might have to think the unthinkable and possibly engage Western forces on the

ground.” He acknowledged that such a deployment would be “extraordinarily unpopular” in Britain and suggested that any such move would be delayed until after a general election set for May, much as the Obama administration postponed the doubling of the number of US troops in Iraq until after the midterm elections in the US.

Washington and its allies are exploiting the barbaric ISIS murder of Peter Kassig, a 26-year-old former Army Ranger who was kidnapped while doing relief work in Syria, in order to whip up support for an expanding US-led intervention in the Middle East.

Obama denounced the killing as an “act of pure evil by a terrorist group.” He said nothing of the gruesome deaths of 16 Syrian army soldiers whose beheadings were depicted in the same ISIS video that revealed Kassig’s murder.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an anti-Assad group, some 483 government soldiers have been killed in this fashion over the last five months alone.

Washington and its allies have backed this slaughter as part of the sectarian-based war for regime-change that they have funded, armed and promoted in Syria. It is this Western intervention, following on the heels of the US decimation of Iraqi society, that created the conditions for the rise of ISIS and its routing of the Iraqi army.



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