Pentagon seeks network of new US military bases in Iraq

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The Pentagon is preparing to develop a network of new US military bases in strategic areas of Iraq, General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters Thursday.

The new US garrisons will house further deployments of hundreds more US troops, beyond the deployment of an additional 450 US forces announced by the Obama administration on Wednesday.

The Pentagon aims to establish a chain of "lily pads, if you will, that allow us to continue to encourage the Iraqi security forces forward," Dempsey said. US military planners are already looking at possible locations for bases in central Iraq, he added.

"We're looking all the time at whether there might be additional sites necessary," Dempsey said while speaking to reporters during a visit to Europe this week.

The US currently maintains a force of some 3,100 troops in Iraq, a figure set to increase to nearly 3,600 as a result of the new deployment announced Wednesday.

The US may eventually decide to go "all-in" with its intervention, State Department spokesman Admiral John Kirby said in statements earlier this week. Even in such a scenario, the war would likely continue for at least 3-5 more years, Kirby said.

The new US garrisons would be modeled on plans for a major joint US-Iraqi training and operational facility to be established at Taqaddum in Iraq's western Anbar province, revealed by the White House on Wednesday.

The new US base is to serve as the staging area for a campaign to retake the city of Ramadi, capital of Anbar province, which was recently seized by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The 450 US troops being deployed to Taqaddum will train Iraqi forces and help them prepare to march on Ramadi, as well as directing ground operations and calling in US air support.

US troops will move "closer to the fight" during joint operations with Iraqi forces in the coming weeks and months, according to officials who spoke to the *New York Times*.

The *Times* article Thursday headlined "Obama Looks at Adding Bases and Troops in Iraq," reported that White House officials have confirmed that Obama is "open" to the Pentagon's demands for a network of new bases and the deployments of hundreds more US troops. The publication of this article, sourced entirely to Obama aides, is the clearest possible sign of a further massive expansion of US intervention in Iraq.

The White House will "seriously consider" any proposals for new bases submitted by the Defense Department, Obama administration spokesman Josh Earnest vowed Thursday in reply to Dempsey's remarks.

Similarly, deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes said Obama will "take a hard look" at any proposal for expanded US basing arrangements in Iraq.

Since the initial deployment of some 300 US troops last summer, presented to the public as a "discrete, measured, and temporary" mission of "limited duration," the US has steadily expanded its military presence on the ground while pummeling western and northern Iraq and eastern Syria with some 4,400 air strikes.

In the name of fighting ISIS, whose origins lie in the intervention of US imperialism in Iraq and Syria, the Pentagon is expanding a military intervention which, it becomes clearer every day, amounts to nothing less than the re-invasion and re-occupation of Iraq.

The statements this week from the White House and Pentagon have made clear that these deployments, launched without any pretense of democratic process or debate, were only the opening phase of a much larger and constantly expanding US intervention.

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The Pentagon's moves to establish an entire network of US bases, manned by hundreds more US troops under orders to get "closer to the fight," underscore that "Operation Inherent Resolve" is rapidly metastasizing into a massive ground war. On the current trajectory, it will not be long before thousands and even tens of thousands of US troops are directly engaged in frontline combat operations inside Iraq.

The leading mandarins of US war strategy are coming forward in full-throated support of the Pentagon's proposals for a major expansion of the US military presence in Iraq.

Denouncing Obama's Iraq policy as "creeping incrementalism," Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) demanded that US air forces escalate their onslaught against targets in Iraq and Syria, regardless of the mass slaughter of civilians that he admits will result. "The US cannot make avoiding all civilian casualties a strategic objective," Cordesman said in testimony to Congress last week.

The current military presence in Iraq is "woefully inadequate" and will remain so even after it is expanded to 3,500, according to comments this week from Rick Brennan, a top analyst at RAND Corporation, another staunchly militarist and pro-imperialist think tank.

To facilitate the re-insertion of US forces and shore up its position in Iraq, Washington is engaged in another round of "divide-and-rule" maneuvers like those that tore the country apart in 2006-2007. The US is turning to the Sunni tribes in Anbar province in order to pressure the Shiite elite, now in control of the central government, which has close ties to Iran.

Along with the new bases, the US aims to mobilize Sunni tribes as a "holding force" in support of US and Iraqi forces, along the lines of the "Sunni Awakening," General Dempsey made clear.

After mobilizing Iran-backed Shiite militias in a marriage of convenience against the Sunni extremist forces of ISIS, Washington is now preparing new initiatives aimed at drawing Sunni militias into the melee.

Baghdad is being sent a clear message: toe the US strategic line, or face stepped-up US efforts to bypass and undermine its authority through the redirection of military and financial aid to Sunni forces.

Undisturbed by the transformation of Iraq and Syria into killing fields overrun by fundamentalist militias, the US ruling elite is preparing further sectarian manipulations of the sort that have already produced a bloodbath.

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