

US Defense Secretary Carter announces 560 more US troops to Iraq

By Thomas Gaist
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The United States military will send an additional 560 soldiers to Iraq, bringing Washington's official armed presence in Iraq to some 4,650, according to remarks by US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter Monday.

The additional US forces will be concentrated around Qayyarah Air Base, a facility in northern Iraq, which the US and Iraqi militaries view as the launching pad for planned operations to retake Mosul, Iraq's major northern city, currently held by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The seizure of Qayyarah is also planned to enable a further expansion of the US air war, which has seen US forces fly more than 6,300 attack missions since 2014.

"These additional US forces will bring unique capabilities to the campaign and provide critical enabler support to Iraqi forces," Carter said Monday, after extensive meetings with American military officers and Iraqi officials.

Carter made clear that the deployments are only a prelude to a further escalation of the US intervention, suggesting that a substantially larger US "effort" will be needed to maintain control over Iraqi cities once ISIS forces are driven out of Mosul and other urban areas.

"There will need to be a larger effort to secure the country," Carter said. "We still have important work to do here in Iraq and also in Syria."

The new deployments will "help expand the base at Qayyarah West airfield into a node that can support the Iraqi security forces as they move forward with the Mosul operation," US General MacFarland said Tuesday.

The joint US-Iraqi offensive against Mosul, where some 700,000 are estimated to remain, is predicted to continue for months and produce hundreds of

thousands of additional internal refugees. More than 1.9 million Iraqis were already registered as refugees at the outset of the US-led campaign in July 2014, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Monday's announcement came amid a string of terror attacks in Baghdad, including a car bombing last week that killed more than 300 Baghdad residents and other bombings on Tuesday in Shia-dominated portions of northeast and southern Baghdad, killing another 12. The horrific attacks have underscored the explosive state of sectarian tensions within Iraq and the fragility of the US-backed government. Neither the Abadi government's anti-sectarian initiatives, nor its brutal military campaign against Fallujah have done anything to reverse the slide into ever deeper civil war.

While the latest deployments bring the official US force presence to just above 4,600, the actual number of American troops inside Iraq is likely closer to 6,000, once the hundreds of US Special Forces involved in secret "black" operations, and hundreds of other US forces exempted from the official total by the Pentagon, are included.

The total is still higher once Washington's small army of private military contractors (PMC) is taken into account. Last year alone, the US government reported a tenfold increase in the number of Pentagon-paid mercenaries operating in Iraq, from 250 to over 2,000, a figure that soars to nearly 6,000 when those employed by the State Department and a handful of other federal agencies are considered.

These thousands of American troops and mercenaries are being massed in preparation for bloody offensives aimed at reasserting direct US control over Iraq's largest cities and key military bases.

The seizure of large areas of Iraq by ISIS-led Sunni

insurgents and the threatened collapse of the Baghdad government of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi have forced the Obama administration to authorize a slow-motion reinvasion of the country, as the only way to maintain Washington's hold over the highly strategic country. Having reduced the official troop presence to barely 100 after declaring the war "over" in 2011, President Obama now routinely signs off on new deployments of hundreds more US troops, destined to oversee, guide and participate in large-scale warfare, across Iraq.

Prime Minister Abadi, touted as a stalwart US ally upon his installation as prime minister in September 2014, in contrast to the more Iran-aligned Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (2006-2014), has presided over a constantly deepening crisis of the Iraqi state. Already reeling from the takeover of large areas of northern and western Iraq by insurgents, Abadi's government was roughly shaken in early May, when the militarized central government compound in Baghdad was temporarily overrun by opposition protests organized by the Shia-based Sadrist movement.

The invasion of the fortress-like "Green Zone," erected by the Pentagon to defend the neocolonial Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) installed by US forces after the 2003 invasion, has forced the Abadi government to impose new militarized check points and martial law measures throughout Baghdad. Just weeks after the Green Zone incident, Abadi made clear his commitment to the US neocolonial agenda in Iraq, proclaiming the "liberation" of Fallujah in late June from the center of the ruined city, while sporting the uniform of the Pentagon-controlled Iraqi Counter Terror Services.

The US ruling elite is determined to offset the political weakness of the Abadi government through a constantly growing military intervention, one that now includes thousands of combat troops and growing amounts of heavy weaponry. Earlier this year, hundreds of US Marine Corps shock troops were deployed in secret to northern Iraq, establishing a new US base, "Firebase Bell," and preparing for the artillery bombardment of Mosul in support of Iraqi national troops.

The Pentagon's latest strategy for the new Iraq war, which has been quietly approved by the Obama White

House according to unnamed officials ~~and~~ *Military Times*, envisions conventional, set-piece warfare, including tank offensives aimed at "clearance of the entire length of the Euphrates River Valley."

"This is going to be a much more conventional fight than the [Obama] administration had first calculated," retired US Army Colonel Peter Mansoor said.

The plans also call for US-backed Iraqi forces to advance all the way to Iraq's northern border with Turkey and occupy the border area between Syria and Iraq.

The pouring of US military resources into Iraq is fueling various competing ethnic and national-based factions, who are engaged in a multi-sided and chaotic civil war. The Pentagon strategy seeks to channel this immensely contradictory mix of proxy forces against major urban centers in northern Iraq and western Syria, focused around the ISIS-held cities of Mosul and Raqqa, and US war planners are preparing for clashes with insurgents "throughout a 100-mile corridor stretching from Mosul south to Bayji," according to the *Military Times*.

"Our campaign plan's map has got big arrows pointing to both Mosul and Raqqa," Carter said in January.

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