US Policies in Iraq — Another Fiasco

After US policies in Afghanistan failed, Washington has been facing similar difficulties in Iraq, a country that has been ravaged by conflicts, which began with the US-led intervention.

The New Eastern Outlook has, on more than occasion, pointed out that dissatisfaction felt among the Iraqi populace about the presence, since 2003, of coalition, particularly US forces, in Iraq has recently been growing. It is therefore not surprising that, recently, the US embassy and its military bases in Iraq have become frequent targets of rocket attacks. On September 28, television news channel Al Arabiya reported that a “roadside attack hit a British convoy in Baghdad”.

There have been more than 5,000 US troops and several thousand staff from American private military companies (PMCs) stationed in Iraq. They have been assisting Iraqi forces in combating ISIL and providing security at oil production facilities run by US companies by far from peaceful means, and in fact robbing Iraq of its oil revenues. In January of this year, the Iraqi parliament approved a draft bill “requiring the government to ask Washington to withdraw” US troops from the country. Despite the decision, the United States is yet to remove all of its forces from Iraq. Recently, US servicemen have been in fact moved, in small numbers, from bases in Iraq to Syria. However, these forces are actively replaced by staff from US PMCs.

There is also pessimism among some Iraqis and members of opposition (who are against the US military presence in Iraq) because they do not believe that Washington will keep the promise to withdraw its troops as requested by the Iraqi parliament. Such sceptics have also, on more than one occasion, stated that it will be impossible to ensure stability and security in Iraq unless US servicemen leave the country. On September 28, the news portal Deyerler (Azerbaijan Islam News) reported that Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (an Iraqi political party, designated as a terrorist organization by the US State Department in January 2020) criticized the destabilizing role of the US embassy in Iraq, as its premises were being used to store weapons. According to Deyerler, Fadel Al-Fatlawi, a deputy from the Fatah Alliance (a coalition in Iraqi parliament), urged the nation’s government to show its support for the decision, taken by parliament requiring the US to withdraw its troops form Iraq, by demanding Washington heed it.

In such a climate, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a recent phone call with Iraqi President Barham Salih, warned that the United States “was taking measures to close its embassy in Baghdad” amid attacks on Americans in Iraq. Turkey’s Anadolu Agency reported that the US had already “begun taking preliminary steps to close” its diplomatic mission in the next few months. If the Trump administration decides to proceed with the plan, the American ambassador to Iraq will either be relocated to the US Consulate in Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan Region, or to Al Asad Air Base in Iraq’s Anbar province.

Iraqi prime minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi told officials in his cabinet “that European diplomats were also considering pulling back from Baghdad”. “The closure of embassies means not cooperating with states in the economic, cultural and military aspects, in light of the great challenges facing Iraq,” he said, expressing frustration about the international warnings that were “not directed against the Iraqi government, but against the conditions of the country.”

The public’s reaction to Washington’s threat to close its diplomatic mission in Baghdad has also been noteworthy.

At 104 acres, USA’s Embassy in Baghdad is famously the largest in the world! The facility employs thousands of staff specializing in various areas, with only few of them being actual diplomats, according to Iraqi media. Abdel Bari
Atwan, the editor-in-chief of London-based Arabic news site Rai al-Youm, has also claimed that the US administration had wanted the US diplomatic mission in Baghdad to be “a headquarters for the rule of Iraq and not an embassy”.

At the end of September, an article in The Washington Post stated that “seventeen years after the US-led invasion of Iraq, the US Embassy in Baghdad” had grown to become one of America’s largest diplomatic missions. According to the report:

“President Trump’s decision to order the killing of” Iranian major general Qasem Soleimani near Baghdad International Airport in January of this year “sparked a firestorm in Iraq”. “Iraqi lawmakers urged the expulsion of US troops. Iranian-backed militia groups ramped up a campaign of rocket and small-scale bomb attacks on the US Embassy and Iraqi military bases that host US-led coalition troops”.

In this context, an article published by Rai al-Youm on October 2 seems noteworthy. Its author, Abdel Bari Atwan, expressed his indignation at the behavior of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who dared to treat the Iraqi leadership as if they were “employees or followers” of the US government and threatened “to close the American embassy in Baghdad” if attacks against US personnel did not stop. The article also stated that “the chaos, financial corruption and instability” in Iraq were the result of the US invasion and subsequent occupation. The editor-in-chief also accused the United States of destroying Iraq and killing “at least two million of its defenseless citizens, whether through its siege, occupation and destruction of” the nation, or “support for extremist terrorist groups on its soil”.

According to the Rai al-Youm report, America “supports and funds more than 2000 non-governmental organizations in Iraq”, most of which are engaged in projects aimed at destabilizing the nation and at “sowing the seeds of sectarian strife to tear apart its social fabric”. “America, before talking about international laws and treaties, must formally apologize and pay trillions of dollars in compensation to the families of its victims, orphans, and widows in Iraq, as an expiation for its sins,” the article also states.

In addition, Abdel Bari Atwan claims that “all the missiles that were fired at the Green Zone did not cause any damage to the American Embassy, nor did they injure a single American employee, while a drone, launched from a military base in Iraq, on the order of President Donald Trump, assassinated Major General Qassem Soleimani, head of the Quds Force in the Guard”. The author also states that “the extent of the seriousness of the threats to close the US embassy” remains unknown, hence it cannot be ruled out that it is merely a new attempt to blackmail the Iraqi government. Simultaneously, there have been reports that US is trying to tie the withdrawal of its troops from Iraq with normalization of Iraqi-Israeli relations. According to these sources, Iraq is an open arena for conflict between the US and Iran, and the outcome of this conflict will determine, to a large extent, Iraq’s bearings. “If the US actually manages to contain Iran’s influence in Iraq, as it claims, this would be in exchange for normalization with Israel,” the article states. The Middle East Monitor article also said that “parties and politico-religious forces loyal to Iran” in Iraq launched “a massive campaign against” the United Arab Emirates (UAE) “following its normalization deal with Israel” because the UAE appeared to have abandoned the Palestinian struggle, supported by many in Iraq. Incidentally, Bahrain has also agreed to establish diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv recently.

In any case, it is quite clear to everyone by now that US policies in Iraq, as well as Afghanistan, have been unsuccessful. Hence, embarrassingly enough, it is inevitable that, eventually, the United States will withdraw its troops from both nations.

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