Sincerity of the Pledge to Withdraw American Troops from Iraq Raises Doubts

After Washington’s announcement of its decision to withdraw American troops from Iraq, the question of establishing the sincerity of the USA’s declared step remains at the center of attention for the international community.

Yes, on the one hand it was confirmed that the USA would reduce the contingent at two military bases in Iraq by the end of September this year. This was agreed during the joint meeting of the American-Iraqi committee on 16th of September between the deputy commander of the Iraqi Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Abdul Amir al-Shammari, and the head of the coalition forces, Major General John Brennan. According to the agreement, the reduction will affect bases in Anbar Province and near the city of Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. Nevertheless, the questions of transferring a number of units of American troops to the position of instructors and advisors who “will train units of the national and armed forces of the republic, as well as provide assistance in reconnaissance and planning operations,” were considered at the same meeting. An arrangement for transferring US troops to a “non-combat” position is scheduled to be developed over the course of further meetings.

As a spokesman for the Iraqi army’s joint command, Major-General Tahsin al-Khafaji, confirmed on September 21, several units of the US-led international anti-terrorist coalition will indeed leave Iraq before the end of this month. At the same time, representatives of the Iraqi authorities are declaring that: “Iraq no longer needs foreign military forces on its territory”.

Today, 2,500 American soldiers and around 3,000 military personnel from other countries are stationed in Iraq. They were first deployed there at the start of the 2000s when the USA and its allies invaded to overthrow Saddam
Hussein's regime, and they subsequently took part in the fight against ISIS terrorists (the group is banned in the Russian Federation).

The decision to withdraw foreign troops from Iraq was made on January 5, 2020 by the country's parliament, following a sharp escalation of tensions over the assassination of high-ranking Iranian Commander Qasem Soleimani in an attack on Baghdad airport by the US Air Force on January 3. On July 26, 2021, the US President Joe Biden said that the US military mission in Iraq will be concluded by the end of the year, but cooperation between the two countries in the fight against terrorism will continue. This was confirmed on September 21 at a meeting between US President Joe Biden and Iraqi leader Barham Salih on the sidelines of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

The majority of the US elite is now convinced that invading Iraq was a mistake. A trillion dollars were spent on this war; and, most importantly, it claimed a huge number of lives and innocent victims: 8,000 American soldiers, more than 50,000 Iraqi police officers, and almost 200,000 civilians. In total, the losses amount to almost a third of a million. But even after many years of bloodshed and the deaths of thousands of Iraqis, democracy has never been established in the country, at least by American standards. Rather than establishing a secular form of government, the USA has pushed for the formation of a sectarian government in Baghdad, where religious divisions keep parliament in constant turmoil and division. And could there really be agreement in a government body that was not elected for its ability to lead, but on the place where people pray? As a result of the political and economic crisis, and the terrorist groups of Al-Qaeda and ISIS (both groups are banned in the Russian Federation), the situation threatens to turn into a second Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the American contingent.

In spite of the demands to reduce the number of allied troops from a significant portion of the Iraqi population, many experts fear the possibility that the situation in the country will deteriorate early next year. These fears are underpinned by recent terrorist attacks and raids by ISIS sleeping cells, which still have supporters among the local population and can mobilize their forces once the US has withdrawn from Iraq. Besides, since the Americans have not invested in the effective development of Iraqi forces, their military capacity raises doubts and fears among many that they may replicate the actions of “US-trained” Afghan servicemen who voluntarily sided with the opponents of the former government of Afghanistan.

As for the US-Iraqi agreement on the future of US troops, which is now being finalized, the idea is that the USA will simply stop performing routine combat operations on the ground, having transferred these duties to Iraqi units, and focus on “advisory functions”. They will also provide Iraqis with close air support, collect intelligence, etc. In fact, only those units that were engaged in combat operations will be withdrawn. And the possibility that they will be replaced by new ones of a different profile can’t be ruled out.

Douglas Ollivant, ex-Director of Iraqi affairs at the National Security Council, even admitted to CNN on July 27 that nothing will change following the declaration on the supposed withdrawal of American forces from Iraq: “... Some names will change; I won't be surprised if they rename the operation; perhaps they will downgrate the status of the headquarters in Iraq, which is now led by a lieutenant general. Perhaps a major general or a brigadier general will take charge of it now, which would be more appropriate for the training mission.”

It was not so long ago that the American publication Politico, citing a source in the American administration, also reported that the “end of the military mission” of US troops in Iraq does not mean their withdrawal from the country. This publication, “relying on competent sources,” reported that the American military would not be entirely withdrawn from the territory of the Middle Eastern country. Furthermore, the air force and intelligence will maintain a presence in the country in order to continue activities, which the American side characterize as “the fight against ISIS.”

Therefore, the USA is not preparing to leave Iraq at all, but it will continue to control the country. After all, “advisory functions” is a very broad description, and meanwhile Washington will limit the costs of control. Also, the “advisory presence” will prohibit Iran from seizing control of Iraq and give the United States the opportunity to remain in Syria. And, naturally, American “consultants” will continue to protect the business interests of American companies in the rich Iraqi oilfields.

Thus, the recent announcement that the Pentagon is withdrawing troops from Iraq for the US to focus on the threats posed by Russia and China, made by the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US Armed Forces, General John Hyten, is yet another Washington propaganda ploy. Indeed, so was the contradiction of US President Joe Biden’s appeal to the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, where he emphasized America’s supposed readiness to cooperate with all those who share his country's values and the unwillingness to unleash a new Cold War, despite
continuing competition with a number of countries...

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