

“Humanitarian Intervention” in Iraq and Ukraine: American Double Standards

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Global Research, August 11, 2014

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#), [SYRIA](#),
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On 7th of August, U.S. President Barack Obama authorized “targeted airstrikes” in northern Iraq and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to religious minorities trapped there by Sunni extremists Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). Though this decision has been met with general approval in the U.S. and in Europe, it has not been pointed out that the U.S. is primarily responsible for the situation Iraq finds itself in today. In addition, Obama has been hypocritical, threatening Russia with more sanctions if President Vladimir Putin authorises a humanitarian mission in Ukraine, despite the fact that many civilians in eastern Ukraine are going through similar hardships as the civilians in Iraq.

The Creation of ISIS

The extremist organisation was allowed to come into existence and flourish primarily for two reasons. Firstly, the collapse of the Iraqi state following American military intervention in 2003 allowed ISIS to grow as part of the Al Qaeda group. The U.S. commander in Iraq, General Ray Odierno, described ISIS in 2010 as down but “fundamentally the same as Al Qaeda.” In 2011, after America finally withdrew its troops from Iraq, leaving the country in a dire condition without any genuine security structures, the group rebooted. ISIS successfully freed a number of prisoners held by the Iraqi government and, slowly but surely, began rebuilding their strength. In February 2014 ISIS and al-Qaeda divorced. As Barack Mendelsohn, a political scientist at Haverford College noted: “Over the years, there have been many signs that the relationship between al Qaeda Central (AQC) and the group’s strongest, most unruly franchise was strained.”

The civil war in Syria further allowed ISIS to grow in strength and numbers and to hold the territory securely. As the West and its allies continued to provide financial and military support to the rebels in Syria, some of that support is likely to have trickled down to ISIS, despite Western promises that the aid was not intended for extremist rebels. Indeed if it wasn’t for Russia diverting a planned Western military intervention in Syria, which would have completely shattered any security institutions left in place, it is likely that ISIS would have controlled most of Syria by now, rather than parts of it.

Ultimately, carrying out a military intervention in Iraq in 2003 destroyed the security blanket that held the country together. The weakness of the current Iraqi government allowed terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda and ISIS to develop virtually unopposed. Furthermore, fuelling the conflict in Syria by supplying weapons to the rebels allowed ISIS to

expand and take over swathes of land.

Ukrainian Humanitarian Crisis

Meanwhile, fighting between Ukrainian government troops and pro-Russian militia is continuing to fuel a worsening [humanitarian crisis](#) in eastern Ukraine. Tens of thousands of people are fleeing combat, where almost daily shelling has claimed numerous civilian casualties since late May. The eastern Ukrainian city of Lugansk has declared a state of humanitarian catastrophe over a lack of medical supplies, electricity, lighting, mobile and internet communication. Some 250,000 civilians are unable to leave. Donetsk residents are living under increasing hardship, many taking refuge in basements and bomb shelters.

Most residents in the besieged city have been without water, electricity and gas for a few weeks now. Food supplies are limited, and grocery stores smell of rotting food from the lack of refrigeration. Dozens of people queue for drinking water. At an emergency United Nations council meeting on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine called by Russia on, Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin called the situation in the east, particularly in separatist-held Luhansk and Donetsk, "disastrous" and said Moscow wants to send a humanitarian convoy to the two areas under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

However, instead of being consistent on humanitarian aid and intervention, the United States [warned](#) Russia that any further intervention in Ukraine, including under the pretence of delivering humanitarian aid, would be viewed as "an invasion of Ukraine." Astonishingly, this warning came on the same day as the announcement of airstrikes in Iraq. Both Ukraine and Iraq are currently experiencing a humanitarian disaster, but due to its own political agenda, the U.S. is refusing to allow Russia to assist the civilians trapped in eastern Ukraine while fighting rages on.

A stable international system and law relies heavily on consistent policy and rhetoric. Obama's double standards over similar situations in Iraq and Ukraine are leaving the fabric of the global political system in tatters.

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