

Will Baghdad Defy Washington? Iraqi Parliament Contemplates Buying Russia's S-400 Missile Defense System

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With tensions mounting between Iran and the United States after the latter assassinated Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq, Baghdad has now been pushing to free itself from American domination by calling for foreign troops to leave the country and announcing its intentions in buying the Russian S-400 missile defense system. The complete destruction of the U.S. military base in Anbar province earlier this month demonstrated to Iraqi leaders that it certainly needs to strengthen its air defences since not even American air defense systems could protect their base from the barrage of Iranian missiles. The Iraqi government's intention to buy the S-400 air defense systems from Russia has been talked about since May last year, when the country's ambassador to Moscow said Baghdad had decided to buy the systems. However, no roadmap to purchase the systems have been made yet.

Karim Elaiwi, an Iraqi member of parliament who sits on the security and defense committee, [said last week](#) that

"We are talking to Russia about the S-400 missiles but no contracts have been signed yet. We need to get these missiles, especially after Americans have disappointed us many times by not helping us in getting proper weapons."

It appears the Iraqis will no longer tolerate U.S. occupation and demands in its country, with parliamentarian and security and defense committee member Abdul Khaleq Al Azzawi, defiantly saying

"We authorized the prime minister to get air defense weapons from any country he wants and we authorized him to spend the money for it, from any country. From Russia or anyone."

This comes as hostilities between Iraq and the U.S. increase, with U.S. President Donald Trump threatening to cut Baghdad's access to its key account at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York if they follow through with the Iraqi Parliament's decision to expel the U.S.

military from their country. Not only has there been a threat to cut Iraq from its own money based in the U.S., but there are now threats of \$250 million in military aid to Iraq being cut.

Although these are tactics to force Baghdad into maintaining 'permission' for the U.S. military to remain in Iraq, the clearest sign that this is an American occupation of the West Asian country was with White House National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien comments last week that the U.S. will leave Iraq on its "own terms." The U.S. are not even trying to hide the fact that they are occupying Iraq and rebelling against the government.

Despite the clear occupation, Iraq continues to defy the U.S., and the willingness to purchase the S-400 system is a clear indication of this. It is for this reason that Joey Hood, the U.S. State Department's principal deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, [said on Tuesday](#) in an appearance at the Middle East Institute, an extremely influential Washington think tank, that "A purchase [of the S-400] would probably trigger sanctions, so we advise our partners not to make such purchases."

This was an expected response considering the continued threats of sanctions the U.S. has put against Turkey for its own acquisition of the S-400. Iraq wants to strengthen its air defense and the S-400 systems are considered the best in the world. It must also be remembered that Iraq is already buying modern weapons from Russia, such as the Mi-28 fighter helicopters and T-90 tanks. However, it is likely that Washington considers the purchase of the S-400 from Russia as an indication that the U.S. is losing political and military support in the country – but this was already consolidated by the assassination of Soleimani, an extremely popular figure in Iraq.

Baghdad is already in negotiations for the S-300, the older generation of the S-400. However, it is the S-400, the newest model available for foreign markets, that will provoke resistance in Washington, especially as the U.S.-made Patriot missile defense system has proven to be a failure by not being able to defend U.S. bases in Iraq or Saudi oil facilities, [if we remember](#) the Houthi-led Ansarullah Movement's attack on the ARAMCO site in September last year.

The question then becomes how will Iraq will pay for Russian weapons if their accounts in the U.S. are frozen. Delivery is not so much of an issue despite the U.S. occupation, it is more a matter of how payments will be made. Although Iraqi parliamentarians are boldly declaring their intentions for the S-400 to be purchased, there are significant problems that Baghdad must first be able to overcome, including the extremely strong pressure being applied by the U.S. against Iraq not to buy them. If Baghdad did successfully defy Washington and purchase the systems, it will certainly weaken the U.S.' image in the region, something the North American country will unlikely want to risk.

Will Iraq boldly defy the U.S.? This remains to be seen now.

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