

U.S. Troops Deployed in Iraq Again

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by Jack Kenny

A unit of U.S. Army Special Operations soldiers was recently deployed to Iraq and more U.S. soldiers may soon be on their way, according to a New York Times [report](#) on the impact the civil war in neighboring Syria is having on Iraq's "fragile society and fledgling democracy."

Buried in the 15th paragraph of the report in Tuesday's *Times* was the news that "Iraq and the United States are negotiating an agreement that could result in the return of small units of American soldiers to Iraq on training missions" and that a unit of Army Special Operations soldiers has already been deployed to Iraq to advise on counterterrorism and help with intelligence.

Nearly a decade after U.S. and coalition forces invaded Iraq and overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein and just nine months after withdrawal of the last of the American combat units, the Shia government in Iraq is fighting for its survival against Sunni insurgents in its own country, while struggling to cope with the "spillover" of the fighting and the influx of refugees from the war next door in Syria. Meanwhile, the *Times* reported, the Baghdad government "leans closer" to the Shia regime in Iran and is looking to buy arms from Russia, while continuing to rely on military support from the United States. Aerial attacks by Turkey on Kurdish enclaves in the mountains of northern Iraq have added to the woes of a government trying to assert its sovereignty both in the air and on the ground.

"Iraq recognizes they don't control their airspace, and they are very sensitive to that," said Lt. Gen. Robert L. Caslen Jr., whom the *Times* identified as the U.S. commander leading an effort to accelerate American arms sales to Iraq. Whenever Turkish fighter jets enter Iraq's air space to bomb Kurdish targets, Iraqi officials "see it, they know it and they resent it," Caslen said. Iskander Witwit, a former Iraqi Air Force officer and current member of the Parliament's security committee, expressed his government's determination to put some force behind that resentment.

"God willing, we will be arming Iraq with weapons to be able to shoot down those planes," said Witwit, perhaps foreshadowing an all-out war between Iraq and Turkey, a war that would likely draw the United States into the conflict, since Turkey is a NATO ally. The potential for the United States to be caught in a web of conflicting alliances was noted by long-time leftwing dissident and antiwar activist Tom Hayden. Writing for [thenation.com](#), Hayden noted the U.S. support of the insurgency in Syria, where the Obama administration has shipped weapons to Sunni rebels, and President Obama's repeated calls for the removal of the government of Bashar al-Assad, a demand the President repeated in his speech at the United Nations on Tuesday.

“The irony is that the U.S. is protecting a pro-Iran Shiite regime in Baghdad against a Sunni-based insurgency while at the same time supporting a Sunni-led movement against the Iran-backed dictatorship in Syria,” Hayden wrote. “The U.S. is caught in the contradictions of proxy wars, favoring Iran’s ally in Iraq while trying to displace Iran’s proxy in Syria.”

While the United States is providing Iraq with refurbished anti-aircraft guns, free of charge, those weapons are not scheduled for arrival before June of next year. Meanwhile, the *Times* reported, Iraqis are trying to get in working order “cold war-era missiles found in a junkyard on an air base north of Baghdad.” Iraq is also negotiating with Russia to buy air defense systems that can be delivered more quickly than those bought from the United States. The U.S., meanwhile, is continuing with a \$19 billion program of weapons sales to Iraq.

At the same time, the United States has been pressuring Iraq, thus far unsuccessfully, to deny the use of its air space to Iran for flights of weapons and fighters to aid the Syrian government in its war against insurgents in that country. While some Congressional leaders are threatening a cutoff of aid to Iraq unless Baghdad moves to stop the flights, the ongoing sale of U.S. arms to the beleaguered nation is an effort by U.S. officials to secure Iraq as an ally.

Iraq’s Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki has sent guards at the border with Syria to stop the flow of refugees from Syria’s civil war. Some of those trying to escape the violence in Syria fled there from Iraq during the height of the Iraq War and are now trying to return. An estimated 2 million Iraqis were made homeless by the sectarian wars and the fighting between insurgents and coalition forces during the nine-year military occupation of Iraq by the United States and its allies. One refugee, having returned to Iraq after enduring round the clock shelling in Damascus, told the *Times* he was robbed as he fled.

“It’s the same situation as it used to be in Iraq,” he said of his experience in Syria. “Everyone is afraid of one another.”

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