

US Troops to Iraq and Syria: More “Middle East Madness” as Trump Prepares to March

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We are now moving rapidly into stage II of Levantine Madness as the US boosts its intervention in the war-torn Mideast.

Five thousand US troops are back in Iraq to bolster the shattered nation's puppet regime that is propped up by American bayonets. New Iraqi military formations have been formed, totally equipped with modern US M1 Abrams tanks, Humvees, and fleets of trucks. More US forces are on the way.

These US-financed Iraqi units are euphemistically called 'anti-terrorism forces' and are supervised by US officers. In fact, what we see is the old British Imperial Raj formula of white officers commanding native mercenary troops.



Members of the Iraqi 6th Emergency Response Battalion conduct weapons training under the supervision of U.S. Special Operations Forces. (Photo: [DVIDSHUB](#)/flickr/cc)

These Iraqi units are now assaulting ISIS-held Mosul, Iraq's second city, and smaller towns. Most of America's Iraqi 'sepoys' (as native troops in the British Indian Raj were known) are Shia bitterly opposed to the nation's minority Sunnis. After its 2003 invasion of Iraq, the US encouraged animosity between Shia and Sunni as a way of breaking resistance to foreign occupation - 'divide et impera' as the Romans used to say.

Interestingly, the backbone of ISIS leadership is made up of senior officers of Saddam Hussein's old Iraqi army. The 'Mother of All Battles' continues, as President Saddam predicted shortly before he was lynched.

Meanwhile, thousands of US troops and Special Forces are now also engaged in Syria though just whom they are battling remains confused. Syria has become a mad house of warring factions backed by outside powers - a sort of modern version of Germany's dreadful 30 Year's War of the 1600's.

The overall US commander for the Mideast, Gen. Joseph Votel, just asked the Trump administration for a large number of new American troops, saying he lacks the military resources to subdue and pacify the Levant. Votel, who is pretty sharp and a star of the US Army's Special Operations 'mafia,' also just warned that India and Pakistan risked triggering a nuclear war, a grave danger this writer has been worrying about for years.

Meanwhile, the crazy-quilt war in Syria that was started by the Obama administration and the Saudis has become unmanageable. Syrian government forces are being strongly backed by Russia and slowly driving back anti-regime forces backed by the US, Saudi Arabia, France and, ever so quietly, Israel. ISIS and what's left of al-Qaida are battling the Damascus government, sometimes discreetly aided by the western powers.

America's main ally in Iraq and Syria are Kurdish militias of the PYD party, an affiliate of the older PKK which has sought an independent Kurdish state for decades. I covered the long, bloody war between the Turkish armed forces and the PKK in Eastern Anatolia during the mid-1990's. Turkey is desperately concerned that formation of even a mini-Kurdish state in northern Syria or Iraq will eventually lead to creation of a large Kurdish state in Turkey. Eighteen percent of Turks are ethnic Kurds. The mighty Turkish Army will never allow this to happen.

The Turks just watched the US break up Sudan, creating the new state of South Sudan, which has turned into a bloody disaster. Could Turkey be next? Many Turks suspect the US was behind the recent coup attempted against Turkey's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Washington would like a more obedient leader in Ankara – or see the army generals back in power.

Turkey calls the Kurdish PYD 'terrorists.' The US calls them comrades in arms and finances them. Clashes between the Turks and PYD appear very likely. PYD's blood brothers, the PKK, continue to wage bombing attacks across Turkey along with Islamic State. US forces in the region could easily be drawn into this murky fracas.

Meanwhile, ISIS appears increasingly vulnerable. It has lost almost half of Mosul, the one big city it holds. The ISIS 'capital,' Raqqa, will soon be overrun by US-led Iraqi forces and Kurds. Raqqa is a two-by nothing, one-camel town of no military value whatsoever. There is no way that 3,000 or so ISIS hooligans with only small arms could hold off a serious attack by regular troops and massed airpower, including B-52 and B-1 heavy bombers.

Why Raqqa was not taken a year ago or more remains one of the war's major mysteries. As I've previously written, I suspect that the US and Saudi Arabia originally helped create and arm ISIS to be used against Syria's government and Afghanistan's Taliban movement. The US has long pretended to fight ISIS but has barely done so in reality.

Maybe this time it will be for real. ISIS has largely slipped out of the control of its western handlers, a bunch of 20-something wildmen whose main goal is revenge for attacks on Muslim targets. Without modern logistics, heavy weapons and trained officers the idea that ISIS could stand up to any western forces is a joke. It's only when ISIS confronts ramshackle Arab forces that it has any clout. And that's because mostly Iraqi Arab forces have no loyalty to their governments. They are merely poorly paid mercenaries.

As if this witch's brew was not sufficiently toxic, US and Russian aircraft and Special Forces are brushing up against one another in Syria. At the same time, the US Navy in the nearby Persian Gulf is provoking the Iranians to please President Donald Trump who seems determined to have war with Iran.

The US Navy is now threatening to impose a naval blockade on war-torn Yemen, another joint US-Saudi warfare enterprise that has gone terribly wrong.

History shows it's also easy to lie, flag-wave and bluster into war but awfully hard to get out. Trump, whose main information sources appears to be Fox fake TV news, does yet seem to understand this verity. He should have a good look at Afghanistan, America's longest war, now in its 16th year of stalemate. The Pentagon, heedless that Afghanistan is known as 'the Graveyard of Empires,' wants more troops.

[Eric Margolis](#) is a columnist, author and a veteran of many conflicts in the Middle East. Margolis recently was featured in a special appearance on Britain's Sky News TV as "the man who got it right" in his predictions about the dangerous risks and entanglements the US would face in Iraq. His latest book is [American Raj: Liberation or Domination?: Resolving the Conflict Between the West and the Muslim World](#).

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