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## The U.S. Slide Into Open-Ended Conflict in Iraq

**The White House has been announcing troop deployments, with varying justifications and objectives, for over a year**

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On Wednesday, the White House announced the deployment of “450 additional U.S. military personnel to train, advise, and assist Iraqi Security Forces at Taqaddum military base in eastern Anbar province.” It is easy to conceive of this latest limited addition of U.S. troops to Iraq, and nearby countries, in isolation, and as the logical and necessary next step in the expanding campaign against ISIS. However, the White House has been announcing troop deployments, with varying justifications and objectives, for over a year now. If you are one of the few people truly interested in how the United States has gradually slid into this open-ended conflict, with little public debate, and zero congressional input, it is worthwhile to review some of the notable milestones along the way.

On June 16, 2014: “275 U.S. military personnel are deploying to Iraq to provide support and security for U.S. personnel and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.” This package was initially described as being for force-protection and intelligence-gathering purposes. Pentagon spokesperson Rear Admiral John Kirby pledged that the deployment “will be of a limited duration” and would be “a discrete, measured, temporary arrangement to help us to get eyes on the ground, to figure out what’s going on and get a better sense of it.” This language is worth

bearing in mind, because Kirby told MSNBC earlier this week that even if the U.S.-led coalition went “all in” to defeat ISIS “it’s still going to take three to five years.”

If 450 more U.S. advisors actually have the promised impact on the course of the conflict, it would be astonishing and unprecedented.

The bombing campaign against ISIS began on August 8, 2014, with President Obama declaring that he had no intention of the United States “being the Iraqi air force.” With U.S. pilots having conducted almost 80 percent of all of the airstrikes against ISIS—in Iraq and Syria—Obama’s expressed concern from last year is now the reality. Since the bombs started dropping there were other intermittent deployment announcements, including on September 2: “350 additional U.S. military personnel to protect our diplomatic facilities and personnel in Baghdad,” and on November 7: “1500 additional U.S. military personnel in a non-combat role to train, advise, and assist Iraqi Security Forces, including Kurdish forces.”

What Obama administration officials have attempted to emphasize with each new announcement is that the latest introduction of troops or tasks is logical, necessary, and will have an impact on achieving the strategic objective of the degrading and destroying ISIS. Just Wednesday, Brett McGurk, the deputy special presidential envoy for the global coalition to counter ISIS, told reporters: “Given the fact that the Iraqis have put the Anbar operation center there, I think this will have a fairly dramatic effect on just their situational awareness of the enemy.” If 450 more U.S. advisors—who will not arrive at the base for six to eight weeks—actually have this substantial of an impact on the course of the conflict it would be astonishing and unprecedented. And when they eventually fail to achieve this effect, most politicians and pundits will have forgotten this pledge, as they have for many others made by Obama administration officials over the past year regarding the campaign against ISIS.

Finally, as I pointed out recently, with each new U.S. troop deployed to Iraq, you should expect that at least one additional private military contractor will be sent to support them. Naturally, none of the White House or Pentagon proclamations about U.S. troops going to Iraq ever mention the contractors that go with them, because officials want to maintain the impression of a more limited U.S. military footprint and commitment. Yet, between June 2014 and today, the number of private military contractors has grown from between an estimated 1,700 to fully 6,300. That is just another troubling component of America’s growing and deepening commitment to Iraq’s security that interested readers might want to look into.