

Non-combat US troops in Iraq engage in combat

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On September 5, US troops were called in by Iraqi authorities to help combat insurgents who attacked an army base in Baghdad. There were no casualties among the American military and the whole incident would hardly be worth mentioning be it not for the fact that American participation in combat took place only five days after the widely advertised pullout of all US combat troops.

The memories of a high profile TV address by President Obama to the nation in which he declared that the mission is over and all combat troops have been withdrawn from Iraq, are still fresh.

Skeptics immediately pointed out that the remaining amount of 50,000 American military was too big for 'advisers' as they are officially called. Doubts were also expressed as to whether the pullout really signifies that the wave of violence in Iraq has subsided and Iraqi officials can cope with the terrorist threat themselves. As a Russian expert, President of the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies Evgeny Satanovsky said in an interview to "Vremya novostey" daily, if Obama's speech did signify anything it was only a recognition of American failure in Iraq and the whole TV address was intended only for internal consumption in view of the complicated situation the Democrats are facing in mid-term elections.

It did not take long to prove that skeptics were right.

Iraqi officials cannot handle the terrorist problem for themselves and non-combat US troops do engage in combat. While helping the Iraqi forces to fend off the attack, US troops used helicopters and unmanned aircraft.

Not only Russian, but American experts as well question the success of US Iraqi policy. An article in The New York Times by Steven Lee Myers and Duraïd Adnan was published on Sunday under a heading that speaks for itself, 'Attack Shows Lasting Threat to US in Iraq'.

In the authors' view, the attack "underscored the ambiguity of the American military's role in Iraq...and punctuated a sharp rise in violence as the United States declared an official end to its combat mission". As for Iraqis, the attack seemed so furious that one of the civilians locked in the compound even thought that this was a coup and that the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had fallen. Well, this time it did not, but the very fact that such a thought occurred to an ordinary Iraqi on the earliest possible instance, does not leave much hope that the government will last long.

Back in 2003, the ongoing Iraqi campaign was widely advertised as "America's imperial moment". In 2008, Obama's promises to withdraw the troops from Iraq turned to be a

significant factor in his election campaign. "Imperial adventure" had apparently failed by that time. Now, the pullout is as widely advertised – Barack Obama is trying to show that he keeps his promises. But the failure of Bush's "imperial project" seems to pound back on Obama. The pullout has proved to be no more than just a pun, with combat troops being simply relabeled as 'advisers' (just like the Operation 'Iraqi Freedom' was renamed 'New Dawn'), and the insurgents taking the opportunity to increase violence.

As BBC World Affairs Editor John Simpson reports from Baghdad, "it is a pattern that every occupying power becomes used to. America, it seems, cannot do anything right – not even getting out."

"America seems to have shrunk as a direct result of its imperial adventure in Iraq," concludes the author, and "it will have to work very hard to persuade the rest of the world that it is strong again."

Iraqi commentators are even more outspoken. "I don't think the Americans are taking this action for the sake of Iraq. They are doing it for President Obama," writes a 49-year old Nermeen Al Mutfi in a BBC blog. "And what are they handing over? There is still violence everywhere." Another blogger, a 42-year old Dr Anees from Baghdad writes, "When the Americans are gone, I believe, it will be easier for the extremists. It is a moral boost for them. They will be victorious because they have kicked the Americans out. But there is no victory, really."

There seems to be more truth in these words of an ordinary Iraqi than in the whole TV address by the President of the world strongest superpower.

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