

US-led Coalition Bills Iraq \$260 Million Despite Failure to Stop ISIS Advances

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Image: The Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group is currently deployed to the area supporting maritime security operations, strike operations in Iraq and Syria as directed, and theater security cooperation efforts in the 5th Fleet AOR. (Photo: AFP/ HANDOUT / US NAVY / MC2 Scott Fenaroli)

The Iraqi people and their political leadership were optimistic when the United States first announced its intention to form an international military coalition to assist Iraq in its war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). At the time, everyone assumed that a solution was close and that Western jet fighters will wipe out ISIS. They all believed that the Obama administration will be Iraq's savior from terrorism.

Since the beginning of the military campaign on August 7, the coalition's warplanes have not launched any significant strikes on the Iraqi territories that changed the course of the war against ISIS or blocked the supply road linking militants in Syria's Raqqa to those in Iraq's Mosul.

According to Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby, the coalition costs Iraq over \$6.7 million a day, but it has yet to find an opening that would enable Iraqi ground forces to recapture regions under ISIS control.

Further proving the inefficacy of the airstrikes, ISIS recently mobilized 2,000 militants in the city of Mosul in northern Iraq. They boarded hundreds of cars and brandished their guns as they held military parades, even though coalition planes were carrying out daily raids on the north. The planes have seemingly missed the large crowds.

From August 8 to September 2, the sorties of coalition planes have cost the Iraqi government \$260 million, representing the first payment of the total cost of the aerial campaign on Iraq and Syria so far, estimated at \$424 million. The remainder is to be settled in the coming period. It is worth noting that the use of one F-16 jet for an hour costs about \$24,000.

However, making these payments contradicts with the declarations of Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari who affirmed in the past that "Iraq will not pay anything to the international coalition for its military campaign in Iraq," adding that "the participating countries will be responsible for these costs." This suggests that the Iraqi government was not aware of the details of the coalition's agreement signed in New York.

Ali al-Saray, a journalist keeping track of the coalition's strikes said

“the international air campaign only postponed ISIS’ advancement, and with time they started to realize how hard it would be to settle the matter after the militants changed their techniques and hid among civilians, then somewhat stopped their public parades.”

Speaking to *Al-Akhbar*, Saray indicated that

“Iraq, its allies in the region and in the world, and the parties that want to get rid of ISIS are realizing the need to consider new strategies in the fight against the group. This is why everyone has started to talk about a Sunni ‘spearhead’ fighting an organization mostly supported by Sunnis.”

“The [anti-ISIS coalition’s] air force will never be able to end the war on its own, it can never win it, and it may go on for many years,” Saray added, calling to “come up with a new strategy which would require some forces on the ground, especially a Sunni force that has to take the decision to oust ISIS.”

Political analyst Walid al-Sheikh told *Al-Akhbar* that “with ISIS’ expansion in different regions, the aerial aspirations of the international coalition have not risen to the expectations.”

“ISIS’ structure was not shaken despite the claims by the US military command about the importance of these airstrike” Sheikh said, further explaining that “the latter (the US command) may be using this as a strategy to mount pressure on [Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar] al-Abadi so he approves a ground incursion as a fait accompli due to the decline of the Iraqi military.”

Western media, which reported on the international coalition with great fanfare, has remained quiet about the results of the coalition’s strikes that were not even revealed by the Iraqi military forces. Meanwhile, the Obama administration and Pentagon officials only talk about the financial costs.

As a matter of fact, officials in Washington have admitted that the airstrikes have only accomplished 10 percent of the set plan, suggesting that there is a long term strategy which will take at least one year, as was previously announced by President Barack Obama. At the time, Obama’s declarations contradicted former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s assertion that ISIS will be crushed within a short period of time.

Ever since the onset of the aerial campaign, coalition aircrafts have focused on the border region between Mosul under ISIS control and Iraq’s Kurdistan in the north, raising suspicions that the West is actually worried about its own interests and is not fighting terrorism, especially since some threatening rallies have emerged near Baghdad, but the West has so far refrained from targeting them.

A source knowledgeable about the meetings held by US advisers in Baghdad revealed to *Al-Akhbar* that “ the coalition made some errors during airstrikes which led to the destruction of weapons and other equipment destined to the Peshmerga and union forces, costing about \$5 million.”

Pro-government paramilitary groups also announced that coalition planes had targeted them by mistake.

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