

US Plans “Slash and Burn” of Middle East to “Minimize” Iranian Influence

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The US is attempting to sell to the public the next phase of its continued occupation and military operations across the Middle East. Predicated on claims of “rebuilding” Iraq and “fighting terrorists” in Syria, it is in actuality a plan to perpetuate for as long as possible the upheaval currently consuming the region in hopes of overextending and exhausting Iran – and by extension – Russia.

Iranian Roadblock to Western Hegemony

The United States in its pursuit of global hegemony has placed particular focus on encircling, containing, undermining, and if possible, overthrowing the socioeconomic and political order of Iran as a means to secure for itself primacy over the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the British followed by the Americans have pursued a multi-generational policy of divide and conquer across MENA.

Nations Anglo-American influence could not outright conquer and co-opt such as the Persian Gulf monarchies – or create in the case of Israel – have been either picked apart and left in ruins through direct or indirect military interventions, or have spent decades staving off open and concerted efforts to divide and destroy their respective nations. These nations include Yemen, Libya, Iraq, and Syria most recently, as well as Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria on and off throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

Iran – above all other nations in the region – reserves a special place for Western attention. Its large population, geography, economy, and military might has provided it space and time to incrementally grow its power and influence throughout the region and the world to dimensions difficult for the West to overcome and dominate.

With 80 million people, a GDP of nearly \$400 billion, and an army over half a million strong, Iran is not Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, nor Libya. And as the technological disparity among nations in regards to conventional military capabilities closes, the West finds itself in an increasingly disadvantageous position in regards to coercing Iran directly through force.

Because of this emerging reality, US policy versus Tehran is shifting from attempting to justify a military confrontation it is no longer certain it can win, to a policy of containment and limited conflict similar to America’s maneuvering in Asia Pacific regarding Beijing.

US Plans to “Minimize” Iran’s Influence in the Middle East

A piece in The Nation Interest penned by Brookings policymakers titled, "[A blueprint for minimizing Iran's influence in the Middle East](#)," attempts to summarize America's current plans regarding the containment or "minimization" of Iranian influence.

In Iraq, the US appears poised to extend its military presence under the pretext of aiding and rebuilding the country. It even suggests proposed aid levels comparable to those given to Afghanistan – a nation where, despite immense aid and a continuous US military presence since 2001 – still has seen and suffered the arrival and spread of the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIS).

The paper claims:

A stronger, more stable Iraq will be much better positioned to resist domination by Iran. Given the stakes, and America's previous investment, aid levels comparable to those given Afghanistan or Egypt are in order. Engaging in this way can also enable the United States to help Baghdad keep an eye on the Iran-backed Shia militias as they are partially disbanded and partially worked into Iraqi Security Forces in coming months.

In reality, the US is neither capable of creating a "stronger, more stable Iraq," nor does it genuinely seek to do so. It will use its continued presence in Iraq to undermine and roll back progress made by Baghdad and its Iranian allies against militant groups including ISIS and Al Qaeda as well as US-backed Kurds in the nation's north.

In particular, the US has invested an inordinate amount of time and resources [to secure highways leading from Baghdad to Iraq's borders with Jordan and Saudi Arabia](#) – two nations that have played a pivotal role in arming, funding, and harboring militants engaged in militant operations from Lebanon and Syria to Iraq and Yemen. With a US presence along these highways, any torrent of logistical support for sectarian violence within Iraq would be difficult to target and eliminate by the Iraqi military or any of its allies – ensuring perpetual conflict.

A stronger, more stable Iraq, considering the nation's Shia'a majority, would be more inclined to seek stronger ties with neighboring Iran than occupying Western forces and fits nowhere into Washington's real plans for the nation. Instead, dividing Iraq into further sectarian conflict and drawing in Iranian support would seek to overextend and exhaust Iranian military power in the region.

In essence, the actual US plan for Iraq is to organize and implement the next round of deadly sectarian fighting.

Regarding Syria, US plans to occupy and administer seized Syrian territory were reiterated – [plans that have been openly pursued](#) since outright US-backed regime change stalled in 2011.

The paper claims:

Still, the United States and like-minded states—as well as global-aid agencies—need to help provide security and economic assistance to regions free of Assad's rule as well as the Islamic State. Some of these regions should be treated as temporary autonomous zones and help govern themselves as

well. Additionally, more western and GCC military strength and support for moderate insurgents is needed in northwest parts of the country, such as in and around Idlib, where the Al Qaeda affiliate, formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra, is still active. Otherwise, either the latter group or Assad's forces backed by Russia and Iran will be the likely victor.

Essentially, the US seeks to Balkanize Syria and continue its proxy war against Damascus.

The article sidesteps intentionally around the fact that Idlib's Al Qaeda occupants were armed, funded, trained, and sent there by the United States and its allies in the first place. It also intentionally sidesteps the reality that there are no "moderate insurgents" in Syria, [and there never were](#).

The paper tips America's hand, revealing that ongoing Western operations in Syria are aimed not at fighting and defeating ISIS or Al Qaeda, but using the presence of both groups as a pretext to prevent the Syrian government from restoring order to the country, preserving its territorial integrity, and rebuilding its economy. Both terrorist organizations serve as placeholders, denying Damascus access to its own territory until US military assets can take and hold it.

In other words, in regards to minimizing Iranian influence in Iraq and Syria, the US is determined to divide and destroy both nations and their people, plunder their resources, and maintain their collective territory as a breeding ground for sectarianism and extremism. Iranian attempts to assist each nation - or both - comes at the cost of extending itself militarily and economically.

Admitting this would be unfeasible in the pages of The National Interest. But claiming that the US must remain in Iraq to "rebuild" the country and continue operations in Syria to "fight terrorism" allows Washington to continue sowing chaos in both nations, chalking up any noticeable inconsistencies between its alleged policy and its actual plans to tenacious terrorists or even Iran itself.

Tony Cartalucci is a Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher and writer, especially for the online magazine ["New Eastern Outlook"](#) where this article was originally published.

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