# HUFFPOST POLITICS

# The Escalation of the War in Iraq Is Grounded in Fantasy



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As President Obama noted in an interview on Sunday on Face the Nation, the next phase of the U.S. war in Iraq has begun.

The administration announced last Friday that it would double the number of U.S. troops in Iraq, to 3,100; request an additional $5.6 billion for the war; and put U.S. trainers closer to the front lines. Add to this the recently announced deal to sell Iraq $600 million worth of tank ammunition, and it's clear that the escalation of the president's "limited" war is well under way.

Of the many fallacies underlying the current U.S. military intervention in Iraq, the greatest may be the idea that the United States has a reliable partner in the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. In his Face the Nation interview, President Obama tied the latest escalation of the war to his trust in the new Iraqi government: "Phase one was getting an Iraqi government that was inclusive and credible -- and we now have done that."

The idea that the Abadi government is inclusive will come as news to people in Iraq. In one of his most consequential decisions since taking office, Abadi appointed Mohammed Salem al-Ghabban, a member of the Badr Organization, as interior minister. The Badr organization is run by Hadi al-Amiri. According to a U.S. embassy cable released by Wikileaks, Amiri ordered the torture and killing of over 2,000 Sunnis between 2004 and 2006 during a campaign of ethnic cleansing in Baghdad. One of the torture methods involved using a power drill to pierce the skull of the victims.

The appointment of a member of the Badr organization as interior minister gives Amiri substantial influence over the agency, if not de facto control. And given that the interior ministry is in charge of the federal police and intelligence agencies in Iraq, this does not bode well for the notion that the new Iraqi government will observe and protect the basic human rights of its Sunni citizens.

Government-sanctioned violence against Sunnis is not a thing of the past. In the aftermath of a series of successful counter-attacks against Islamic State (also known as ISIS) in Diyala province -- attacks in which Amiri was given control of all Iraqi forces -- Sunnis in the area suffered torture, executions, and the burning of entire villages at the hands of Shiite militias that had fought alongside Iraqi security forces.

And in Anbar province, residents of Abu Ghraib mounted a demonstration in mid-October protesting the actions of Shiite militias. Talal al-Zowbai, a member of parliament from Abu Ghraib, told the Washington Post that the actions of the militias are a recruiting tool for Islamic State: "They arrest people, and nobody knows where they are taken. This makes so many people want to volunteer with Islamic State to fight the militias."

Meanwhile, in some parts of northern Iraq the Shiite militias are viewed as being almost as great a danger as ISIS. Tirana Hassan of Human Rights Watch, writing for Foreign Policy, documented a campaign in which the Khorasani brigade -- a Shiite militia armed by the Iraqi government -- took control of an entire village south of Kirkuk and systematically burned down the homes of Sunni residents. Refugees from other towns in the area described similar actions. Hassan quotes a business owner from the village of Hufriyah, as follows: "I took my family out to protect them from ISIS. I didn't realize that the people who came to fight ISIS were going to be the ones we would need protection from."

The Obama administration should think twice about sending arms to the government in Baghdad at a time when many of the weapons are likely to be used by Shiite factions to repress Sunnis in Baghdad and beyond. Unless the Shiite militias are brought under control, President Obama's claim that there is an "inclusive government" in Baghdad will remain a fantasy.

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