



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on January 6, 2014

Kerry Says United States Will Help Iraq but Won't Send Troops

During remarks to reporters in Jerusalem on January 5, Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States will help Iraq's government in its fight against al-Qaeda-linked militants who have overrun the cities of [Fallujah](#) (shown) and [Ramadi](#) — but that we will not send troops back to Iraq.

Kerry's comments came as he was engaged in a Middle East trip to Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia from January 1-6.



During his [press conference](#) at the David Citadel Hotel in Jerusalem on January 5, a reporter asked Kerry:

What specific steps is the Administration prepared to take to help the Iraqi tribes or the Iraqi Government roll back the al-Qaida advance in western and northern Iraq? Nobody is suggesting the U.S. send ground troops, but would the United States be willing to carry out drone strikes from bases outside Iraq? Would you provide arms to the tribes?

Kerry declined to get into specifics but, with a penchant for using superlatives, replied:

First of all, we are following the events in [Anbar](#) province very, very closely, obviously. We're very, very concerned by the efforts of al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant, which is affiliated with al-Qaida, who are trying to assert their authority not just in Iraq but in Syria.

Kerry continued:

I will not go into the details except to say that we're in contact with tribal leaders from Anbar province whom we know who are showing great courage in standing up against this as they reject terrorist groups from their cities. And this is a fight that belongs to the Iraqis. That is exactly what the President and the world decided some time ago when we left Iraq. So we are not, obviously, contemplating returning. We're not contemplating putting boots on the ground. This is their fight, but we're going to help them in their fight.

The United States has provided Iraq with 75 Hellfire missiles and plans to send an unstated numbers of ScanEagle drones by March.

The [Washington Post](#) identified the militants who have made inroads in Anbar province as members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, and said Kerry called them "the most dangerous players" in the region.

The *Post* noted that ISIS was formerly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq but was renamed to demonstrate the group's growing ambitions. The influence of ISIS has been felt across not only Iraq, but also Syria and Lebanon.

The al-Qaeda-linked militants are in control of the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, the latter of which the Iraqi army encircled on Sunday, preparing for an attack. Thousands of civilians have fled the city in



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anticipation of heavy fighting.

The *Post* also cited a statement made to the National Iraqi News Agency by Iraq's army chief, Lt. Gen. Ali Ghaidan Majid, that government air strikes against Ramadi killed 60 ISIS militants on January 4.

Reuters news also reported that 22 soldiers and 12 civilians were killed in Ramadi in fighting on January 5 that left an unknown number of militants dead.

Britain's [Sky News](#) on January 5 quoted a statement from Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki that government troops will remain in the Anbar region until the militants are "eliminated." "There will be no retreat until we eliminate this gang and rid the people of Anbar of their evil acts," al-Maliki said. "The people of Anbar asked the government for help; they called us to come to rescue them from terrorists."

Sky News also reported that tribesmen and the Iraqi army have worked together in Ramadi to counter the al-Qaeda-linked ISIS militants seeking to take control.

But in Fallujah, the situation was quite different, as ISIS received a boost after being joined by tribesmen against the government. *Sky News* noted that this represented a change from the years prior to the U.S. withdrawal, when major Sunni tribes turned against al-Qaeda.

[Fox News](#) quoted a statement issued Saturday by Republican Senators John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) calling recent events in Iraq "as tragic as they were predictable." The senators stated:

While many Iraqis are responsible for this strategic disaster, the administration cannot escape its share of the blame. When President Obama withdrew all U.S. forces ... over the objections of our military leaders and commanders on the ground, many of us predicted that the vacuum would be filled by America's enemies and would emerge as a threat to U.S. national security interests. Sadly, that reality is now clearer than ever.

Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003, [McCain made a statement in the Senate](#) countering remarks made by the late Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.) — who had served in the Senate since 1959 — opposing the impending invasion. In his speech, Byrd stated: "Today I weep for my country. I have watched the events of recent months with a heavy, heavy heart. No more is the image of America one of strong, yet benevolent peacekeeper. The image of America has changed. Around the globe, our friends mistrust us, our word is disputed, our intentions are questioned."

Byrd stated that "[the Bush] administration has directed all of the anger, fear, and grief which emerged from the ashes of the Twin Towers and the twisted metal of the Pentagon towards a tangible villain, one we can see and hate and attack. And villain he is. But he is the wrong villain. And this is the wrong war. If we attack Saddam Hussein, we will probably drive him from power. But the zeal of our friends to assist our global war on terrorism may have already taken flight."

The West Virginia senator noted: "There is a pervasive sense of rush and risk and too many questions unanswered. How long will we be in Iraq? What will be the cost? What is the ultimate mission? How great is the danger at home?"

In response to Byrd, McCain countered:

The United States of America has involved itself in the effort to disarm Saddam Hussein, and now freedom for the Iraqi people, with the same principles that motivated the United States of America in most of the conflicts we have been involved in, most recently Kosovo and Bosnia, and in which, in



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both of those cases, the United States national security was not at risk, but what was at risk was our advocacy and willingness to serve and sacrifice on behalf of people who are the victims of oppression and genocide.

So I respectfully disagree with the remarks of the Senator from West Virginia. I believe the President of the United States has done everything necessary and has exercised every option short of war, which has led us to the point we are today.

I believe that, obviously, we will remove a threat to America's national security *because we will find there are still massive amounts of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.* [Emphasis added.]

On September 30, 2004, the [U.S. Iraq Survey Group Final Report reported](#), "The ISG has not found evidence that Saddam possessed WMD stocks in 2003, but [there is] the possibility that some weapons existed in Iraq, although not of a militarily significant capability."

On June 5, 2008, the [Senate Select Committee on Intelligence](#), chaired by Sen. John D. (Jay) Rockefeller (D-W. Va.) released a report on what it found about pre-war Iraq intelligence. The committee's press release quoted from Rockefeller's statement in the report:

In making the case for war, the Administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent. As a result, the American people were led to believe that the threat from Iraq was much greater than actually existed.

In his pre-invasion speech, McCain revealed himself to be a thoroughly interventionist neoconservative, consistent with his membership in the interventionist-leaning Council on Foreign Relations (CFR):

Although Theodore Roosevelt is my hero and role model, I also, in many ways, *am Wilsonian in the respect that America, this great Nation of ours, will again contribute to the freedom and liberty of an oppressed people who otherwise never might enjoy those freedoms.* [Emphasis added.]

Woodrow Wilson, of course, dragged the United States into its first major overseas war, World War I, in which no U.S. interests were at stake.

McCain and his colleague Sen. Graham continue to criticize the removal of U.S. troops from Iraq, a war in which there was no legitimate U.S. interest, and no congressional declaration of war. Our involvement there, furthermore, made the situation even more untenable for many Iraqis, especially Iraq's Christians, who enjoyed freedom of religion under Saddam Hussein.

The supposed reason why the United States should still be maintaining a military presence in Iraq, according to McCain, is to counter al-Qaeda elements there. Yet, had the United States never toppled Saddam Hussein, as McCain so eagerly advocated back in 2003, it is unlikely that al-Qaeda would have gained a foothold in Iraq. Saddam had no record of cooperating with al-Qaeda, and in fact, [he and Osama bin Laden were very much at odds](#), philosophically.



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