

## Begging for US military in Baghdad?

By Brendan Bordelon

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Are things so bad in Iraq that the government in Baghdad would like U.S. troops to return?

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki appealed to President Obama for the U.S. military's assistance on Friday, after his country suffered its most violent month in over five years.

Just under 1,000 people — overwhelmingly civilians — were [killed](#) in sectarian violence across Iraq in the last 31 days, making October the deadliest month since the height of the Iraq War in April 2008. The majority died via that hallmark of the Iraqi insurgency, the car bomb.

It's the high-water mark for a rising tide of bloodshed since the complete withdrawal of American troops in December 2011. This year has proven particularly vicious, with the United Nations estimating well over 7,000 Iraqis killed in violent attacks since the start of 2013.

That number was undoubtedly on both Obama and Maliki's minds as they met at the White House. Maliki had refused the president's half-hearted attempt to renew American troop authorizations in 2011, but on Friday the prime minister begged Obama to send Apache attack helicopters and other military assets before his country descends back into civil war.

"We have a request — I won't say a right — it's a request," Maliki said Thursday in a speech at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington. "Its not only about Iraq, but it's about all the countries in the world that are suffering from terrorism."

In a statement Friday evening, President Obama [pushed](#) Maliki for a more "inclusive" democracy and urged him to hold elections next year. He made no mention of providing military assistance.

White House press secretary Jay Carney said he did not "anticipate troops on the ground."

Experts say the turmoil in Iraq is caused as much by Maliki's authoritarianism as it is by international terrorists from war-torn Syria and elsewhere. Since American troops withdrew in 2011, the Shi'a Muslim prime minister has used his political cronies and security forces to suppress the rights of Iraq's substantial Sunni Muslim minority.

“[Maliki] doesn’t want to admit that his policies have caused any part of this, and so he’s blaming it all on Syria and that is part of the problem,” said Fred Kagan, a defense scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute.

“It’s isn’t news [that Maliki needs U.S. help],” he told The Daily Caller News Foundation. “Certainly one could ask him what’s taken him so long to figure this out, because it’s been apparent for at least a year that the Iraqi security forces were not up to this.”

Ted Carpenter, a foreign policy researcher at the libertarian Cato Institute, agreed that Maliki was part of the problem. “This is part of the regional Sunni-Shiite struggle, and that gets us to Maliki’s request,” he told TheDCNF. “In essence, he’s wanting us to take sides in that fight. He portrays it as Sunni militants, knowing that an American audience thinks of that term as al-Qaida or equivalent.”

“Iraq was always a highly-artificial country,” he continued. “I think what we’re seeing now is an increase in the likelihood it will break up into three major ethno-religious components.”

Situated in Iraq’s mountainous north, the Iraqi Kurds already enjoy de-facto independence. The fight to come, Carpenter says, will be between Sunni and Shi’a Arabs over the rest of the country.

“By virtue of numbers, the Shiites are likely to win that fight,” he said. “But it could be a very bloody, very prolonged fight, and there’s always the possibility that Iraqi Sunnis, being part of a larger Sunni community in the Middle East, could end up on top once again.”

Kagan concurs, worrying that Sunni rebels from western Syria could ally with extremists from western Iraq to form a radical “Sunnistan” in the heart of the Middle East. He supports limited American efforts to prevent this possibility, although he cautioned against becoming too involved.

“I don’t there’s a good option for sending American troops back in even apart from the politics of it, and I wouldn’t advocate that,” he said. He does support sending intelligence analysts and air assets to back up to the Maliki government, although those would be conditional on democratic reforms. But he has “no idea” what the Obama administration would actually do.

Carpenter thinks Obama will probably send limited military support, trying to walk a “tightrope” between the Sunni and Shi’a factions. But he worries that won’t be easy.

“I think the violence is much more likely to escalate over the coming months, and the United States has to be very, very careful it does not end up in the middle of this fight,” he concluded.