



## US Officials in Glass Houses Shouldn't Throw Stones

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Secretary of State Antony Blinken's snide comment about the Russian-led military intervention in Kazakhstan at the invitation of that country's beleaguered government to help quell the mounting violence there backfired quickly. The initial White House reaction to the deployment of approximately 2,500 peacekeeping troops was relatively measured. "We are closely monitoring reports that the Collective Security Treaty Organization have (sic) dispatched its collective peacekeeping forces to Kazakhstan," Press Secretary Jen Psaki stated. "We have questions about the nature of this request and whether it has – it was a legitimate invitation or not. We don't know at this point."

Blinken, though, apparently couldn't resist an opportunity to bash Russia. Cautioning the Kazakh government, he observed that "One lesson of recent history is that once Russians are in your house, it's sometimes very difficult to get them to leave." Given Washington's track record over multiple decades of similar behavior, Blinken was very far out on a fragile rhetorical limb, and Russian foreign ministry officials quickly sawed it off. "If Antony Blinken loves history lessons so much, then he should take the following into account: when Americans are in your house, it can be difficult to stay alive and not be robbed or raped," the ministry said on its social media channel. A ministry spokesman specifically cited Vietnam and Iraq as countries in which prolonged, horribly destructive US military occupations had taken place.

Even a cursory examination of Washington's bullying behavior toward Iraq's government since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein should have induced more caution on Blinken's part. The pattern of abrasive conduct reached a revealing zenith in January 2020, following the US drone strike that killed Iranian General Qassem Soleimani during his official visit to Baghdad. The attack itself exhibited a brazen disregard for Iraq's sovereignty, but what followed was even worse.

When Iraq's parliament responded to the Soleimani assassination by passing a measure authorizing the prime minister to demand the withdrawal of US troops still in the country, Washington revealed the extent of its contempt for a supposed ally. President Donald Trump threatened Iraq with harsh economic sanctions if it dared take that step, warning that "we will charge them sanctions like they've never seen before, ever. It'll make Iranian sanctions look somewhat tame."

It quickly became apparent that the sanctions threat was not a spontaneous, intemperate outburst on the part of a notoriously volatile US president. Compelling Iraq to continue hosting US forces

was a high-priority administration policy. Senior officials from the Treasury Department and other agencies began drafting specific sanctions that could be imposed. Washington explicitly warned the Iraq government that it could lose access to its account held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Such a freeze would have constituted financial strangulation of the country's already fragile economy. The U.S.-held account, which consisted primarily of Iraq's oil revenues, represented nearly 90 percent of the government's budget. A freeze on those funds would have led to immediate bankruptcy.

Administration officials subsequently made it very clear that Washington would not even discuss the issue of a US troop withdrawal. Indeed, US forces still remain in Iraq in 2022, albeit with the fig leaf of relabeling them as "advisers" rather than combat personnel. Iraqis who object to the US military presence definitely have found it very difficult to get their American "guests" to leave.

Other societies have experienced similar intense opposition to any effort to terminate an entrenched US military presence. During the early 1990s, US political and military leaders ferociously resisted the campaign of Filipinos to have the United States withdraw its forces from Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base. Indeed, it took the eruption of a volcano that buried Clark in mud and ash to pry the US military out of that facility. Washington accepted the Philippine Senate's subsequent decision to end the Subic lease only with extreme reluctance, and the Pentagon has worked assiduously ever since (with gradual success) to regain a military foothold in the Philippines. The US military does not go home willingly, and a onetime host country apparently must lock the door behind them if those forces ever do leave.

Russia's track record regarding respect for the sovereignty of other states certainly does not warrant admiration. Moscow used the turmoil in Georgia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union to send peacekeeping troops into South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two regions resisting the authority of the new Georgian government. Those forces remain to this day, and in 2008 Moscow fought a war with Georgia to thwart Tbilisi's bid to regain control. Russian military units continue to assist separatist forces in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. So, there is legitimate reason to wonder if they will leave Kazakhstan, even if order is restored.

However, Blinken's clumsy, caustic comment deserved a devastating retort, and it received one. Given Washington's track record of arrogant militarism toward multiple countries, US leaders should be more cautious about expressing self-righteous criticisms about the military deployments of other governments. Officials standing in front of Washington's crystal palace are not in a good position to hurl stones.

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