

Iraq: Operation Enduring Occupation

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

The 2008 National Defense Strategy reads:

“US interests include protecting the nation and our allies from attack or coercion, promoting international security to reduce conflict and foster economic growth, and securing the global commons and with them access to world markets and resources. To pursue these interests, the US has developed military capabilities and alliances and coalitions, participated in and supported international security and economic institutions, used diplomacy and soft power to shape the behavior of individual states and the international system, and using force when necessary. These tools help inform the strategic framework with which the United States plans for the future, and help us achieve our ends.”

It adds:

“... Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing or equaling the power of the US. To accomplish this, the US will require bases and stations within and beyond western Europe and Northeast Asia.”

In light of such clear objectives, it is highly unlikely that the US government will allow a truly sovereign Iraq, unfettered by US troops either within its borders or monitoring it from abroad, anytime soon.

The Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the Iraqi and US governments indicate an ongoing US presence past both the August 2010 deadline to remove all combat troops, and the 2011 deadline to remove the remaining troops.

According to all variations of the SOFA the US uses to provide a legal mandate for its nearly 1,000 bases across the planet, technically, no US base in any foreign country is “permanent.” Thus, the US bases in Japan, South Korea and Germany that have existed for decades are not “permanent.” Technically.

Most analysts agree that the US plans to maintain at least five “enduring” bases in Iraq.

Noted US writer, linguist and political analyst Noam Chomsky, [said](#), “Bases [abroad] are the empire. They are the point of projection of power and expansion of power.”

Chalmers Johnson, author and professor emeritus of UC San Diego [commented](#), “In a symbolic sense [bases] are a way of showing that America stands there watching.”

Longtime defense analyst from George Washington University, Gordon Adams, told The Associated Press that in the broader context of reinforcing US presence in the oil-rich Middle

East, bases in Iraq are preferable to aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf. “Carriers don’t have the punch. There’s a huge advantage to land-based infrastructure. At the level of strategy it makes total sense to have Iraq bases.”

According to Professor Zoltan Grossman of The Evergreen State College, who has been researching military bases and participating in the global network against foreign bases for several years, the US [has no intention](#) of releasing control of its bases in Iraq. The Pentagon, he believes, has many old tricks to mask a military presence and armed pressure.

In an interview with Truthout he observed:

“Since the Gulf War, the US has not just been building the bases to wage wars, but has been waging wars to leave behind the bases. The effect has been to create a new US military sphere of influence wedged in the strategic region between the E.U., Russia and China. The Pentagon has not been building these sprawling, permanent bases [just to hand them over](#) to client governments.”

Grossman’s prediction for Iraq:

“Look for a Visiting Forces Agreement – of the kind negotiated with the Philippines – that allows supposedly ‘visiting’ US forces unrestricted access to its former bases. Similarly, constant joint military exercises can keep US troops continually visible and intimidating to Iraqis. Even after 2011, nothing in the Iraq Status of Forces Agreement prevents US bombers (stationed in Kuwait and elsewhere) from attacking Iraqi targets whenever they want, just as they did between 1991 and 2003. Nothing prevents the type of missile or Special Forces attacks like we’re seeing in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Nothing prevents CIA or contractors from participating in Iraqi missions or intelligence operations.”

Adding credence to this, we have Article 6 of the US/Iraqi SOFA discussing “agreed facilities,” Article 27 mentions “mutually agreed ... military measures” after 2011 and Article 28 talks of a scenario where Iraq is able to “request” US security in the International Zone (Green Zone.)

Gray Language

Chapter six of the [2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report](#) stated:

“In February 2009, President Obama outlined the planned drawdown of US forces in Iraq to 50,000 troops and the change in mission by August 31, 2010. By this time, US forces will have completed the transition from combat and counterinsurgency to a more limited mission set focused on training and assisting the Iraqi Security Forces (\$2 billion has [already been set aside](#) for this for FY2011); providing force protection for US military and civilian personnel and facilities; and conducting targeted counterterrorism operations and supporting US civilian agencies and international organizations in their capacity-building efforts.”

The report further clarifies that US troop drawdowns “will occur in accordance” with the SOFA, but that “the pace of the drawdown takes into consideration Iraq’s improved, yet fragile, security gains” and “provides US commanders sufficient flexibility to assist the Iraqis with emerging challenges.”

On May 15, 2006, Gen. John Abizaid, overseeing US military operations in Iraq at the time,

said, "The United States may want to keep a long-term military presence in Iraq to bolster moderates against extremists in the region and protect the flow of oil."

On March 12, 2010, Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo, the commander of US troops in Northern Iraq, [told reporters](#) during a conference call that it might be necessary to keep combat troops involved in the security mechanism that maintains peace between Iraqi national and Kurdish regional forces beyond the August deadline.

The National Security Strategy for US Missions abroad proposes to "Ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade and pressing for open markets, financial stability, and deeper integration of the world economy." This fits perfectly with the policy outlined by the Quadrennial Defense Review Report, which says there is a stated ability for the US military to fight "multiple overlapping wars" and to "ensure that all major and emerging powers are integrated as constructive actors and stakeholders into the international system."

Such gray language and loopholes in policy documents have been common since the US invaded Iraq seven years ago. This has not changed with the SOFA.

"The likelihood of the US planning to keep troops in Iraq after December 31, 2011 has to be measured in the context of the history of US violations of other countries' sovereign territory, airspace, etc.," Phyllis Bennis, director of the New Internationalism Project with the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC, explained to Truthout. "At the moment, this is perhaps most obvious in Pakistan - where the US has been routinely attacking alleged Taliban or al Qaeda supporters with both air and [limited] ground troops in Pakistani territory despite the stated opposition of the Pakistani government which is nominally allied to the US."

"The early public discussions of 're-missioning' combat troops, changing their official assignment from combat to 'training' or 'assistance,' thus allowing them to remain in Iraq after the August 2010 deadline for all combat troops to be removed from the country, provides the model for how such sleight of language will occur," Bennis said, adding, "It may or may not be linked to a future 'need' for US troops to remain to protect the increasing numbers of US government civilians assigned to Iraq as the official number of troops decreases."

Bennis explained that the language of the SOFA is grounded in the claim that Iraq is a sovereign nation and that the government of Iraq is choosing freely to partner with the US government. But the reality, according to Bennis, is that the SOFA was negotiated and signed while Iraq was (and continues to be today) a country occupied and controlled by the United States. Its government is and was at the time of the SOFA's signing dependent on the US for support.

In Article 27 of the SOFA, the text stated, "in the event of any external or internal threat or aggression against Iraq that would violate its sovereignty, political independence, or territorial integrity, waters, airspace, its democratic system or its elected institutions, and upon request by the Government of Iraq, the Parties shall immediately initiate strategic deliberations and, as may be mutually agreed, the United States shall take appropriate measures, including diplomatic, economic, or military measures, or any other measure, to deter such a threat."

While the agreement is ostensibly binding only for three years, Article 30 permits amendments to the SOFA, which could, of course, include extending its timeframe – and with the Iraqi government still qualitatively dependent on US support, this appears likely. The same is true for Article 28, which states, “The Government of Iraq may request from the United States Forces limited and temporary support for the Iraqi authorities in the mission of security for the Green Zone.”

She concluded:

“There is no question that the US has wanted for many years to establish and maintain military bases in Iraq, whether or not they are officially designated as “permanent.” I do not believe the Pentagon is prepared to hand them all over to Iraq, despite the language in the agreement mandating exactly that. Instead, I think the formal arrangement following expiration of the current SOFA may be through some sort of officially “bilateral” agreement between Washington and Baghdad, allowing for the US to “rent” or “lease” or “borrow” the bases from an allegedly “sovereign” government in Iraq on a long-term basis. The likelihood of this increases with the growing number of statements from US military and political officials hinting broadly at the possibility of a long-term presence of US troops in Iraq after December 31, 2011, “if the sovereign government of Iraq should request such an idea...”

Faculty Director of the Undergraduate College of Global Studies at Stony Brook University in New York, Professor Michael Schwartz, has written extensively on insurgency and the US Empire.

He pointed out to Truthout that President Obama’s “... actions have made it very clear that he is unwilling to sacrifice the 50,000-strong strike force, even while he has also said he would abide by the SOFA and remove all troops from Iraq by the end of 2011. In the meantime, Gates and various generals have [released hedging statements or trial balloons](#) saying that the 2011 deadline might be impractical and that various types of forces might stay longer, either to provide air power, to continue training the Iraq military, or to protect Iraq from invasion. Any or all of these could translate into the maintenance of the 50k strike force as well as the five ‘enduring bases.’”

That the Obama administration intends to maintain a significant military presence in Iraq after 2011 is obvious from its continued insistence that in Iraq “democracy” must be guaranteed.

Schwartz explained:

“In Washington speak this means that the government of Iraq must be an ally of the United States, a condition that has been iterated and reiterated by all factions (GOP and Democrat) in Washington, since the original invasion. Given the increasing unwillingness of the Maliki administration to follow US dictates (for example, on oil contracts, on relations with Iran, and on relations with Anbar and other Sunni provinces), the removal of troops would allow Maliki even more leeway to pursue policies unacceptable to Washington. Thus, even if Maliki succeeds himself in the Premiership, the US may need troops to keep the pressure on him. If he does not succeed himself, then the likely alternate choices are far more explicit in their antagonism to integration of Iraq into the US sphere of interest ... the Obama administration would then be left with the unacceptable prospect that withdrawal would result in Iraq adopting a posture not unlike Iran’s with regard to US presence and influence in the Middle East.”

His grim conclusion:

“All in all, there are myriad signs that withdrawal of US troops might result in Iraq breaking free from US influence and/or deprive the United States of the strong military presence in that part of the Middle East that both Bush and Obama advocated and have struggled to establish. Until I see some sign that the five bases are going to be dismantled, I will continue to believe that the US will find some reason – with or without the consent of the Iraqi government – to maintain a very large (on the order of 50k) military force there.”

Expanding the Base

The US embassy in Iraq, [already the largest diplomatic compound on the planet and the size of the Vatican City](#), is now likely to be doubled in size. Robert Ford, the deputy chief of mission in Baghdad, [told reporters in January](#), “If Congress gives us the money we are asking for, this embassy is going to be twice the size it is now. It’s not going down, it’s getting bigger.”

In 2005, [The Washington Post reported](#):

“An even more expensive airfield renovation is underway in Iraq at the Balad air base, a hub for US military logistics, where for \$124 million the Air Force is building additional ramp space for cargo planes and helicopters. And farther south, in Qatar, a state-of-the-art, 104,000-square-foot air operations center for monitoring US aircraft in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa is taking shape in the form of a giant concrete bunker ... the US military has more than \$1.2 billion in projects either underway or planned in the Central Command region – an expansion plan that US commanders say is necessary both to sustain operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and to provide for a long-term presence in the area.”

Lt. Gen. Walter E. Buchanan III, who oversees Central Command’s air operations pointed out, “As the ground force shrinks, we’ll need the air to be able to put a presence in parts of the country where we don’t have soldiers, to keep eyes out where we don’t have soldiers on the ground.”

In 2007 in a piece titled “US Builds Air base in Iraq for the Long Haul” [NPR reported](#), “The US military base in Balad, about 60 miles north of Baghdad, is rapidly becoming one of the largest American military installations on foreign soil ... The base is one giant construction project, with new roads, sidewalks, and structures going up across this 16-square-mile fortress in the center of Iraq, all with an eye toward the next few decades.”

It is so big that, “There is a regular bus service within its perimeter to ferry around the tens of thousands of troops and contractors who live here. And the services are commensurate with the size of the population. The Subway sandwich chain is one of several US chains with a foothold here. There are two base exchanges that are about as large as a Target or K-Mart. Consumer items from laptop computers to flat-screen TV’s to Harley Davidson motorcycles are available for purchase.”

The report added, “Several senior military officials have privately described Balad Air Base, and a few other large installations in Iraq, as future bases of operation for the US military.” The term used is “lily pad,” a description of the military jumping from base to base without ever touching the ground in between.

In September 2009 [The New York Times reported](#) about Balad:

"It takes the masseuse, Mila from Kyrgyzstan, an hour to commute to work by bus on this sprawling American base. Her massage parlor is one of three on the base's 6,300 acres and sits next to a Subway sandwich shop in a trailer, surrounded by blast walls, sand and rock. At the Subway, workers from India and Bangladesh make sandwiches for American soldiers looking for a taste of home. When the sandwich makers' shifts end, the journey home takes them past a power plant, an ice-making plant, a sewage treatment center, a hospital and dozens of other facilities one would expect to find in a small city. And in more than six years, that is what Americans have created here: cities in the sand.... Some bases have populations of more than 20,000, with thousands of contractors and third-country citizens to keep them running."

Camp Anaconda, as the Balad base is named, also has an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The bottling company there provides seven million bottles of water a month for those on base. This base also contains two fire stations and the single busiest landing strip in the entire Defense Department.

A 2006 Associated Press story, "Elaborate US Bases raise long-term questions," gave the following account:

"[At Balad] the concrete goes on forever, vanishing into the noonday glare, 2 million cubic feet of it, a mile-long slab that's now the home of up to 120 US helicopters, a "heli-park" as good as any back in the States. At another giant base, al-Asad in Iraq's western desert, the 17,000 troops and workers come and go in a kind of bustling American town, with a Burger King, Pizza Hut and a car dealership, stop signs, traffic regulations and young bikers clogging the roads. The latest budget also allots \$39 million for new airfield lighting, air traffic control systems and upgrades allowing al-Asad to plug into the Iraqi electricity grid - a typical sign of a long-term base. At Tallil, besides the new \$14 million dining facility, Ali Air Base is to get, for \$22 million, a double perimeter security fence with high-tech gate controls, guard towers and a moat - in military parlance, a "vehicle entrapment ditch with berm."

Truthout contacted renowned journalist and filmmaker John Pilger for his views:

"Like Afghanistan, the occupation of Iraq is more a war of perception than military reality. I don't believe the US has the slightest intention of leaving Iraq. Yes, there will be the "drawdown" of regular troops with the kind of fanfare and ritual designed to convince the American public that a genuine withdrawal is happening. But the sum of off-the-record remarks by senior generals, who are ever conscious of the war of perception, is that at least 70,000 troops will remain in various guises. Add to this up to 200,000 mercenaries. This is an old ruse. The British used to "withdraw" from colonies and leave behind fortress-bases and their Special Forces, the SAS.

"Bush invaded Iraq as part of a long-term US design to restore one of the pillars of US policy and empire in the region: in effect, to make all of Iraq a base. The invasion went badly wrong and the "country as base" concept was modified to that of Iraq indirectly controlled or intimidated by a series of fortress-bases. These are permanent. This is also the US plan for Afghanistan. One has to keep in mind that US foreign policy is now controlled by the Pentagon, whose man is Robert Gates. It is as if Bush never left office. Under Bush there was an effective military coup in much of Washington; the State Department was stripped of its power; and Obama did as no president has ever done: he brought across from a previous, discredited administration the entire war making bureaucracy and gave it virtually unlimited

power. The only way the US will leave is for the resistance to rise again, and for Shiites and Sunni to unite; I think that will happen.”

Captain, My Captain

On March 4, 2010, as a guest on NPR’s “The Diane Rehm Show,” Thomas Ricks, who was the military correspondent for the Washington Post, referring to President Obama’s promises to withdraw from Iraq, said, “I would say you shouldn’t believe [it] because I don’t think it’s going to happen. I think we’re going to have several thousand, several tens of thousands of US troops in Iraq on the day President Obama leaves office.”

Gen. George Casey, the chief of staff of the US Army, stated last May that his planning for the Army envisions combat troops in Iraq for a decade as part of a sustained US commitment to fighting extremism and terrorism in the Middle East. “Global trends are pushing in the wrong direction,” [he said](#), “They fundamentally will change how the Army works.”

Senior CIA analyst Ray McGovern, who served under seven presidents – from John Kennedy to George H. W. Bush – explained to Truthout, “Since 2003 I’ve been suggesting that the Iraq war was motivated by the acronym OIL: oil, Israel, and Logistics (military bases to further the interests of the first two).”

In January 2008, McGovern [wrote](#) of statements signed by George W. Bush when he was in the White House:

“Contrary to how President George W. Bush has tried to justify the Iraq war in the past, he has now clumsily – if inadvertently – admitted that the invasion and occupation of Iraq was aimed primarily at seizing predominant influence over its oil by establishing permanent (the administration favors “enduring”) military bases. He made this transparently clear by adding a signing statement to the defense appropriation bill, indicating that he would not be bound by the law’s prohibition against expending funds:

“(1) To establish any military installation or base for the purpose of providing for the permanent stationing of United States Armed Forces in Iraq,” or

“(2) To exercise United States control of the oil resources of Iraq.”

At the Chicago Council on Global Affairs on November 20, 2006, in a speech titled “A Way Forward in Iraq,” Sen. Barack Obama, who had not yet become the commander in chief of the US military, declared:

Drawing down our troops in Iraq will allow us to redeploy additional troops to Northern Iraq and elsewhere in the region as an over-the-horizon force. This force could help prevent the conflict in Iraq from becoming a wider war, consolidate gains in Northern Iraq, reassure allies in the Gulf, allow our troops to strike directly at al Qaeda wherever it may exist, and demonstrate to international terrorist organizations that they have not driven us from the region.

On March 16, 2010, Gen. David Petraeus, head of US Central Command, [told lawmakers](#) that the US military may set up an additional headquarters in northern Iraq even after the September 2010 deadline. Petraeus said that putting a headquarters in northern Iraq was “something we are looking at.”

What reason is there to doubt our commander in chief 's assertion that there is need to maintain an (approximately 50,000 strong) US "strike force" in or near Iraq to guarantee US interests in the Middle East, to allow Washington to move quickly against jihadists in the region and to make clear to "our enemies" that the US will not be "driven from the region"?

Bhaswati Sengupta contributed to this report.

*Dahr Jamail's new book, [The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan](#), is now available. Order the book here <http://tinyurl.com/cnlgyu>. Visit Dahr Jamail's website <http://dahrjamailiraq.com>. As one of the first and few unembedded Western journalists to report the truth about how the United States has destroyed, not liberated, Iraqi society in his book *Beyond the Green Zone*, Jamail now investigates the under-reported but growing antiwar resistance of American GIs. Gathering the stories of these courageous men and women, Jamail shows us that far from "supporting our troops," politicians have betrayed them at every turn. Finally, Jamail shows us that the true heroes of the criminal tragedy of the Iraq War are those brave enough to say no. Order *Beyond the Green Zone* <http://dahrjamailiraq.com/bookpage>*

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