



Written by on November 10, 2010

Gates Says U.S. Willing to Extend Iraq Stay

Voice of America news reported a statement made by Defense Secretary Robert Gates on November 9 that the United States is willing to keep troops in Iraq past the current 2011 deadline, if Iraq's leaders request an extension of U.S. troop presence. VOA noted that Gates made the comment to reporters in Kuala Lumpur following a meeting with Malaysia's Defense Minister.



A [CBS News report](#) from AP quoted from Gates' statement: "We'll stand by. We're ready to have that discussion if and when they want to raise it with us."

"In terms of the future strategic relationship beyond the end of 2011, I would say that the initiative clearly needs to come from the Iraqis," another report from AFP quoted the Defense Secretary as saying in Kuala Lumpur. "We are open to discussing it."

AFP noted that about 50,000 US troops are currently in Iraq under a new "advise and assist" mission that places Iraqi forces in the lead, with U.S. troops in a supporting role.

Gates, who is a member of the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations, assumed his position in 2006, during the administration of George W. Bush and was the sole member of the Bush Cabinet to retain his post under President Obama. He also served as Director of the CIA from 1991-1993 under President George H.W. Bush.

The possibility of U.S. troops remaining in Iraq beyond 2011 seems to nullify the official position that the U.S. combat role in the tumultuous Middle Eastern nation ended on August 31. The irony of the situation was noted in a headline placed above a September 7 AFP story reading "[First US 'Non-combat' Troops Killed in Combat Since 'End of Combat Operations' Declared in Iraq.](#)"

As the U.S. military presence in Iraq continues into its eighth year, excerpts from former President George W. Bush's memoirs, published in a book entitled *Decision Points* on November 9, have been reported in the press.

The [Herald of Scotland reported](#) on November 10 that Bush became "sickened" upon learning that he had sent troops into Iraq based on faulty intelligence.

"The reality was that I had sent American troops into combat based in large part on intelligence that proved false," the report quoted.

"No-one was more shocked or angry than I was when we didn't find the weapons [of mass destruction]. I had a sickening feeling every time I thought about it. I still do."

Another report about the Bush memoirs in the British [Guardian](#) notes:

George Bush ordered the Pentagon to begin planning for an invasion of Iraq within two months of the 9/11 attacks, he reveals in his memoirs.



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Sixteen months later, after many prayers and much diplomatic maneuvering, he took a slow, silent lap round the south lawn on the eve of the bombing of Baghdad. "I prayed for our troops, for the safety of our country, and for strength in the days ahead. Spot, our springer spaniel, bounded out of the White House toward me. It was comforting to see a friend. Her happiness contrasted with the heaviness in my heart."

He then sat down to write to his father, former president George Bush, who had attacked Iraq in 1991. "Dear Dad, at around 9:30am, I gave the order to SecDef to execute the war plan for Operation Iraqi Freedom. In spite of the fact that I had decided a few months ago to use force, if need be, to liberate Iraq and rid the country of WMD [weapons of mass destruction], the decision was an emotional one."

But the *Guardian's* reference to Bush's memoirs observed that despite many regrets the former President has about how the war was conducted, he does not consider the invasion itself to have been a mistake. Bush wrote:

"The region is more hopeful with a young democracy setting an example for others to follow. And the Iraqi people are better off with a government that answers to them instead of torturing and murdering them." Bush maintains: "There are things we got wrong in Iraq, but the cause is eternally right."

Perhaps *some* people in Iraq are better off now than when Saddam Hussein was in power. Shiite Muslims are probably better off now under Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki than they were under Hussein, who was a largely secularized Sunni. Sunni Muslims have certainly seen their influence in the Iraqi government diminish.

As for Christians in Iraq, that is an entirely different matter.

In our report published here on October 26 "[Former Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz Sentenced to Hang](#)," we quoted from a June 2, 2010 article in *USA Today* headlined "[For Christians in Iraq, the threats persist](#)," which observed:

Before the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 there were about 1.4 million Christians in Iraq, a Muslim-dominated nation of nearly 30 million. Since then, about 50% of Iraq's Christians have fled the country, taking refuge in neighboring Jordan, Syria, Europe and the USA, according to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

And in a follow-up article, "[Reactions to the Sentence of Tariq Aziz](#)," the following day, we also cited another report published on About.com entitled "[Christians of the Middle East: Country-By-Country Facts, A Presence Dating Back Two Millennia](#)," which noted:

Christians have been in Iraq since the 2nd century — mostly Chaldeans, whose Catholicism remains deeply influenced by ancient, eastern rites, and Assyrians, who are not Catholic. The war in Iraq since 2003 has ravaged all communities, Christians included. A rise in Islamism diminished Christians' security, but attacks on Christians appear to be receding. Nevertheless, the irony, *for Iraq's Christians, is that on balance they were far better off under Saddam Hussein than since his downfall*. As Andrew Lee Butters writes in *Time*, "About 5 or 6 percent of Iraq's population in the 1970's were Christian, and some of Saddam Hussein's most prominent officials, including Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz were Christians. But since the American invasion of Iraq, Christians have fled in droves, and constitute less than one percent of the population." [Emphasis added.]

Former President Bush did not specify which demographic group of "the Iraqi people are better off"



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since the removal of Saddam Hussein and the installation of Nouri al-Maliki, but his assessment obviously excludes Iraq's Christian population. And to supporting this end, U.S. troops may remain in Iraq indefinitely.

Photo: U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates inspects a guard of honor during a welcoming ceremony at Malaysia's Ministry of Defense in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Nov. 9, 2010: AP Images



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