



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on October 22, 2011

Obama Proclaims End of Iraq War as Contractor War Continues

But Obama's own Deputy National Security Adviser Denis McDonough [acknowledged](#) in a press conference the same day that the withdrawal from Iraq was more due to demands from the Iraqi government than from Obama's commitment to keep his campaign promises. "The security agreements negotiated and signed in 2008 by the Bush administration stipulated this date ... as the end of the military presence. So that has been in law now for — or been enforced now for several years. So it's difficult to rebut the proposition that this was a known date." In essence, Obama trumpeted a troop withdrawal that he had little choice but to follow.



Indeed, Obama was most reluctant to follow through on his campaign promise. The *National Journal* [reported](#) October 22 that "as recently as last week, the White House was trying to persuade the Iraqis to allow 2,000-3,000 troops to stay beyond the end of the year. Those efforts had never really gone anywhere; one senior U.S. military official told *National Journal* last weekend that they were stuck at 'first base' because of Iraqi reluctance to hold substantive talks." According to the *National Journal*, the sticking point was that U.S. troops retain diplomatic immunity while in Iraq, a license the Maliki regime was unwilling to grant. McDonough [admitted](#) the administration did discuss immunity as an issue in deliberations on keeping troops in Iraq.

Moreover, the Obama administration found an end-run around the Iraqi troop ban. Asked if the ongoing guerrilla war in Iraq is sustainable by the divided Iraqi government, McDonough [replied](#) that the U.S. State Department will retain a "civilian" military ground force in Iraq. "I think it's around 4,000 to 5,000 security contractors in various forms of security, be that for site security — remember we have at least three diplomatic posts. We have a consulate down in Basra, we have a consulate up in Erbil and then we have the embassy in Baghdad. Then, obviously, we're going to have our people driving around and everything else."

McDonough [noted](#) that the war in Iraq will now be managed by the State Department through the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I): "The Office of Security Cooperation in Iraq will have a capacity to train Iraqis on the new kinds of weapons and weapons systems that the Iraqis are going to buy, including, importantly, like the F-16s that they just purchased just about a month ago." While it's unclear what role a fixed-wing fighter aircraft will have in fighting an Iraqi guerrilla insurgency marked by improvised explosive devices, it is clear that McDonough only described part of the force to be left behind. The *Washington Post* [noted](#) that State Department logistical staff (including the 5,000 military contractors) will total "an estimated 16,000 civilians under the American ambassador — the size of an Army division."



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In [testimony](#) before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee February 1, James F. Jeffrey, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Office, claimed the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) would continue the war off the books in Iraq and produce some lucrative weapons contracts for key defense contractors. "It will allow for continued fulfillment of 336 cases of Foreign Military Sales (valued at \$8 billion) and ensure the delivery of M1A1 tanks, patrol boats, howitzers, armored personnel carriers, and more. The OSC-I will also enable the delivery of an additional 61 cases of Foreign Military Sales (valued at \$5 billion) already requested by the Government of Iraq. It is projected to have a full-time staff of 157 military and civilian personnel as well as hundreds of case-related specialists for Foreign Military Sales at any one time."

While it is true that U.S. foreign wars are winding down, the Pentagon budget is only seeing a slight decrease. President Obama noted in his [Weekly Address](#) to the nation October 22 that "as we remove the last of our troops from Iraq, we're beginning to bring our troops home from Afghanistan. To put this in perspective, when I took office, roughly 180,000 troops were deployed in these wars. By the end of this year that number will be cut in half, and an increasing number of our troops will continue to come home." Yet the Nobel Peace Prize-winning President has [proposed](#) a budget that would cut only \$65 billion from an \$885 billion security budget in the current 2012 fiscal year, which is [triple](#) the \$294 billion spent in fiscal 2000. The ongoing security spending by President Obama has led many on the anti-war left and right to wonder where the peace dividend is.

Indeed, even though the troop deployments and bombings are apparently coming to an end, the war-level spending is not.

Hat tips for this story: The [AntiWar.com](#) and Salon's [Glenn Greenwald](#).

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