



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 11, 2011

Pentagon Reconsiders End to Iraq War

With just eight months left until the last American soldier is presumably to be pulled from Iraq, finally ending the eight-year war in that beleaguered country, the Pentagon is reconsidering its decision. The Associated Press reports:

Reluctant to say it publicly, officials fear a final pullout in December could create a security vacuum, offering an opportunity for power grabs by antagonists in an unresolved and simmering Arab-Kurd dispute, a weakened but still active al-Qaida or even an adventurous neighbor such as Iran.



As a result, the Pentagon is considering the possibility of maintaining thousands of soldiers in Iraq to guard the “still-fragile” peace. Defense Secretary Robert Gates indicated as much during a visit with the U.S. Commander in Iraq last Thursday and Friday, emphasizing that the troops who remain will not be engaged in combat.

Gates maintained that the American commitment in Iraq “depends on what the Iraqis want and what we’re able to provide and afford,” adding that the United States is considering a number of possibilities, including staying an extra couple of years to work with Iraq as a permanent partner.

Some officials contend that the Iraqi military’s air defenses and other military capabilities require further development in order to combat both external and internal enemies.

According to President George W. Bush’s former advisor on Iraq, Meghan O’Sullivan, there may be too little time to renegotiate the terms of the security agreement that set the upcoming deadline:

The question is, can both sides agree on something more modest but which still provides an adequate legal basis for a smaller number of American troops to stay in Iraq, with quite defined missions?

Similarly, Senator Lindsey Graham, a leading skeptic of President Obama’s plan to turn over the Iraq mission, contends that the withdrawal of American troops in December is a “formula for failure.” He asserts that at least 10,000 American troops should remain in Iraq until 2012, adding, “If we’re not smart enough to work with the Iraqis to have 10,000 to 15,000 American troops in Iraq in 2012, Iraq could go to hell.”

Regardless of Gates’ proposal to extend the American stay in Iraq, Army General Lloyd Austin, the top American commander in Iraq, says he has not been contacted by the Pentagon to recommend any extension. When asked if he believed an extension to be a wise idea, Austin failed to reply but implied as much when discussing gaps in Iraq’s military capabilities:

Certainly if you’re in the Iraqi military you understand what your capabilities and your gaps are,



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but if you're an average citizen, unless somebody like a minister of defense or a minister of interior begins to explain that to you, you just don't know. If you see a lot of soldiers you think you have a lot of capabilities, but that may not be the case.

The very possibility that American troops may remain in Iraq beyond the deadline for their removal supports what non-interventionists such as Congressman Ron Paul (R-Texas) contend is the predictable outcome of U.S. military intervention in foreign nations: *the indefinite occupation of those foreign countries*. In a number of cases — ranging from the military action in [Iraq](#) to the earthquake in [Haiti](#) — the United States has committed to the “reconstruction” of the countries in question, which typically requires sustained military occupation.

In 2008, Congressman Paul [reiterated](#) his early modest prediction that the war in Iraq would lead to a 30-year occupation of that country:

I warned of a draining 30-year occupation. Now, politicians glibly talk about a 100-year occupation as if it is no big deal. On cost, according to estimates from the Congressional Research Service, we have already burned through around \$550 billion in Iraq, at a rate of about \$2 billion per week. Economist Joseph Stiglitz's estimates are even higher, at \$12 billion a month. It is a total price tag quickly heading into the trillions, if we don't stop bombing and rebuilding bridges in Iraq that lead us nowhere but bankruptcy!

Also noted by Congressman Paul is that what is almost always touted as a “humanitarian mission” in the justification for military occupation is typically nothing more than an attempt to establish American protectorates (in the case of Haiti) or American partners (Iraq).

True fiscal and constitutional conservatives such as Paul had hoped to see an end to the war in Iraq in the near future, and find the Pentagon's reconsideration of the promises made to end that war disappointing, though predictable.

For now, however, Secretary Gates has indicated that American military occupation in Iraq will not be extended without requests from the Iraqi military. Without those requests, December 31 is set to mark the end of the U.S. military action in Iraq and the return (or redeployment to Afghanistan or Libya, or elsewhere) of 47,000 U.S. troops.



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