



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on December 15, 2011

Americans Still Fighting in Iraq Despite War's Official End

“Let me be clear: Iraq will be tested in the days ahead — by terrorism, and by those who would seek to divide, by economic and social issues, by the demands of democracy itself,” Panetta said. “Challenges remain, but the U.S. will be there to stand by the Iraqi people as they navigate those challenges to build a stronger and more prosperous nation.”



The war has been declared finally over more than eight and a half years after President George W. Bush declared the end of American combat operations in Iraq, while standing under a banner proclaiming, “Mission Accomplished.” Yet as the *Times* report pointed out, “insurgents continue to attack American soldiers and militants with Al Qaeda still regularly carry out devastating attacks against civilians.”

The United States retains two military bases and roughly 4,000 soldiers in Iraq, a significant reduction from the 55 bases and more than 150,000 troops in the country in 2007. But after fighting two wars with Iraq in the past two decades the United States now has in Baghdad the world's largest embassy, with more than 16,000 employees and 763 civilian contractors. No timetable has been announced for withdrawal of the troops who remain to train Iraqi forces and assist in security. American's interest in Iraq's oil supply and Iraq's continued purchase of American-made weapons will continue to promote close ties between the two nations, and President Obama's warning to other countries not to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs suggests the United States has all but formally adopted Iraq as a protectorate. Having spent the lives of 4,487 Americans, with some 32,000 more wounded and a decade-long occupation of Iraq at a cost of a \$1 trillion or more, the United States is unlikely to remain on the sidelines if another country should invade the land or otherwise engage the Iraqi forces that remain under American tutelage.

For now, the Iraq military still has the insurgents to deal with. The formal ceremony at the heavily fortified airport was in stark contrast to the base closing in recent months. Last spring commanders stopped holding base-closing ceremonies because they had become occasions for insurgent attacks.

“We were having ceremonies and announcing it publicly and having a little formal process, but a couple of days before the base was to close, we would start to receive significant indirect fire attacks on the location,” Col. Barry Johnson, a spokesman for the military in Iraq, told the *Times*. “We were suffering attacks so we stopped.”

Photo of Defense Secretary Leon Panetta: AP Images



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