



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 20, 2011

Huge U.S. Iraq Embassy to Increase Staff, Budget

Observers might think that the largest, most expensive embassy ever built — the \$750 million, heavily fortified U.S. embassy in Baghdad — would be more than sufficient to sustain the diplomatic corps that will remain in Iraq after U.S. troops are withdrawn. In fact, however, that 1.5-square-mile walled complex is, according to the Huffington Post's Dan Froomkin, "turning out to be too small for the swelling retinue of gunmen, gardeners and other workers the State Department considers necessary to provide security and 'life support' for the sizable group of diplomats, military advisers and other executive branch officials who will be taking shelter there once the troops withdraw from the country."



The last remaining troops are scheduled to leave Iraq by December 31, though the Obama administration has been [working hard](#) to ensure that some residual force remains — anywhere from 3,000 to 10,000 troops. But while the official military presence is declining, the number of embassy personnel is set to double to 16,000, about half of whom will be security forces. The State Department will have 5,000 security contractors comprising a [private army](#) under the command of the Secretary of State. Meanwhile, the Office of Security Cooperation will get 3,000 armed guards to protect the office's personnel as they enrich U.S. defense contractors to the tune of "an estimated \$13 billion in pending U.S. arms sales, including tanks, squadrons of attack helicopters and 36 F-16s," Froomkin reports.

The United States will also have two consulates in Iraq besides the Baghdad embassy, and it plans to have over 1,000 staffers at each consulate. Froomkin argues that "the diplomatic corps" has already taken a "substantial" hit from the staffing of the embassy; adding 2,000 more personnel at the consulates cannot help matters any. Then again, a government whose slogan is "You're either with us or against us" — a situation that has changed little since Obama took office — hardly has much use for diplomats, who are trained to negotiate. Anyone can deliver an ultimatum.

As a result of its staff buildup, the State Department is seeking \$6.2 billion for Iraqi operations next year, nearly triple what it received for Iraqi operations this year and almost half as much as its entire 2011 budget. "The Senate Foreign Relations Committee estimates that State's plans will cost \$25 to \$30 billion over the next five years," says Froomkin.

What can taxpayers expect to get for their billions? If after eight years and a couple of trillion dollars Iraq remains so dangerous that the United States has to build a "fortress" (as several individuals interviewed by Froomkin described the Baghdad embassy) to protect its non-military personnel there, are another five years and \$30 billion likely to improve matters significantly? Froomkin notes that the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction reported in July that "Iraq remains an extraordinarily dangerous place to work. It is less safe, in my judgment, than 12 months ago." Observers wonder what



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the probability is that it will be safer in five years no matter how much U.S. taxpayers are forced to pour into it.

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), who has visited the Baghdad embassy, certainly sees things this way. He told Froomkin, "I think we've reached the point in Iraq where whatever we're spending money on, we're throwing good money after bad."

Moreover, said Leahy, "We're told by a lot of the Republican party that we can't even get disaster relief unless we take it out of some other program in the United States, maybe education or health care or something like that. I think it's about time that we started thinking more about money for Americans, more than we do for Iraq or Afghanistan. It's upside down." In this Leahy echoes the sentiments of Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), who has been arguing that while domestic spending needs to be cut in the long run, foreign spending should be first on the chopping block.

That is particularly true when such foreign spending only generates animosity toward the United States, thereby opening up Americans to retaliatory terrorism.

"A lot of people [in Iraq] see us as occupiers and wish we'd leave," Leahy maintained.

Blogger and career Foreign Service employee Peter Van Buren, whose 2009 and 2010 Iraq experiences are recounted in his forthcoming book *We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People*, agreed that the embassy needs to be downsized for both budgetary and diplomatic reasons. Reducing the embassy's size, he told Froomkin, "respects the fact that budgets are tight and sends the signal to the Middle East that we're not there as an occupying power."

He added: "By building a palace — a fortress — in the middle of their country, we're sending a message: We're still here and we're still running the show."

Naturally, such arrogance generates resentment among the Iraqi people. Observes Froomkin:

But no matter how impregnable the embassy compound now seems, it may, in the long run, be doomed. "How long can this enormous fortress on foreign soil stand without at some point offending and angering the population?" asked retired Army Col. Douglas MacGregor, now a military analyst.

"These are supposed to be monuments to our determination and resolve to stay," he said. But, as with the British edifices built in India, he said, "at some point it's inevitable. At some point in the future, this little fortress America comes under siege."

The big fortress America — the security-obsessed United States proper — will also be endangered by the perception that its government seeks to dominate the Middle East from its Baghdad compound. The message "Yankee, go home" can be delivered via a protest sign — or a car bomb in a busy American city.

From both a constitutional and a prudential perspective, an increasing number of Americans are saying that the troops need to be withdrawn from Iraq, and the Baghdad embassy needs to be reduced to the capacity necessary to house a standard-sized diplomatic corps and appropriate security personnel. Failure to do so will lead to more deficit spending, an increased likelihood of U.S. involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts, and the potential for additional terrorist attacks against Americans.

Photo: James F. Jeffrey, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq



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