



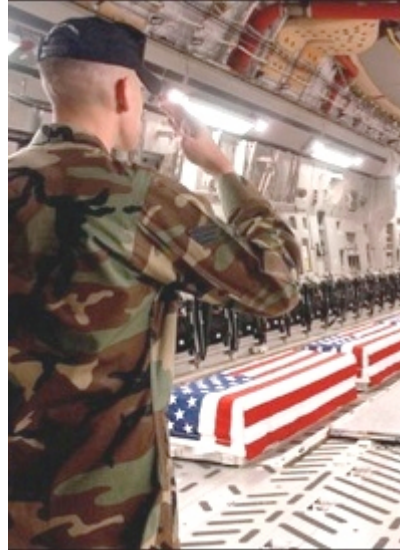
Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on June 13, 2011

Incoming Defense Chief Indicates Prolonged U.S. Iraq Role

American troops have occupied Iraq since March 3, 2003. Eight years later, after the declaration of one president that the mission was accomplished and the campaign promise of another to end the war and withdraw American forces, there is no end in sight to the deployment.

Currently, there are just fewer than 50,000 American troops stationed in Iraq. In 2008, a deal was struck with that country to withdraw the entire American military presence by December 31, 2011.

Leon Panetta, the current director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and incoming Defense Secretary, told the Senate Committee panel, "It's clear to me that Iraq is considering the possibility of making a request for some kind of presence to remain there."



"I believe that if Prime Minister al-Maliki — the Iraq government — requests that we maintain a presence there, that ought to be seriously considered by the President," he further testified.

The remarkable part of Panetta's testimony is that he was able to act as if the Iraqi government's request was not a foregone conclusion. There is nothing the Obama Administration would not do (or the administration that will follow it) to maintain its invaluable outpost of the American Empire in Mesopotamia.

For his part, Maliki said in May that he would make the appropriate request provided that the other factions in his ruling coalition backed the move.

On cue, Panetta said that such a plea would be heeded by the United States and that they would recur to their Iraqi counterparts as to the number of troops needed and the timeframe for the continuing occupation. Not surprisingly, no specific numbers for either was provided by Panetta in his testimony.

An important feature of any melodrama is the villain and it made its appearance in Panetta's presentation. In response to a question posed by Senator John McCain (R-Arizona), Panetta warned:

Senator, I have to tell you, there are 1,000 al Qaeda that are still in Iraq. We saw the attack that was made just the other day. It, too, continues to be a fragile situation, and I believe that we should take whatever steps are necessary to make sure that we protect whatever progress we have made there.

It isn't just the mission of the United States to "disrupt, dismantle, and to defeat" al-Qaeda. There is a more noble element, as well.



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In Iraq, we must assure that the Iraqi military and security forces are prepared to safeguard their nation so that it can become a stable democracy in a very important region of the world.

The Defense Secretary nominee made no reference to the Constitution or to any power granted therein to the government of the United States to disseminate the blessings of “democracy” to the world.

As [reported](#) last month by this author in *The New American*, outgoing Defense Secretary Robert Gates, accustomed to pre-emptive strikes in Iraq, initiated the campaign to secure the troop extension as it was becoming apparent that Baghdad wasn’t hurrying along the path of petitioning the Obama administration for its approval of an extension of the time for troop presence in that country.

In an extraordinary bit of policy passive-aggression, Secretary Gates said that the U.S. would likely agree to Iraq’s request for an extension “to send a message to American allies and Iran that the U.S. isn’t withdrawing from the region.”

“It would be reassuring to the Gulf States. It would not be reassuring to Iran, and that is a good thing,” Mr. Gates said during a presentation delivered to the American Enterprise Institute.

In order to secure the submission of the Iraqi request, a reporter for the BBC [reckons](#) that the United States has “offered Iraq some inducements to maintain its troop presence.”

There is some evidence to support the BBC’s thesis. Last week at a business forum attended by “senior executives from major U.S. corporations,” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [said](#) that Americans should begin viewing Iraq as a money-making venture and not just a theater of combat operations.

President Obama and I and our government believe strongly that expanding economic opportunity is as essential as building democratic institutions. We think they go hand in hand. And in particular, it’s very important for people going through the changes that are sweeping the region and that Iraq has, in many ways, been a leader in demonstrating, to believe and to see that democracy delivers: Is your life better or not? Do your children have a better opportunity or not?

And this is clearly not a job for government alone. It is a very important partnership that has to be forged. Businesses like those represented here at this table create jobs, provide livelihoods, increase standards of living, give hope to individuals and their families. And what government should do, whether it’s in the United States or in Iraq, is to be a good partner, to help create the conditions for investment and growth that will be broadly spread and create a ladder of economic opportunity for those willing to work hard, to acquire the education and skills required in the modern world.

Now, we are entering a new phase in our relationship with Iraq, and we are very committed to making a major civilian commitment to Iraq’s future. We’ll be opening, as you know, and running consulates in Irbil and Basra, we’ll have civilian experts available to work with not only Iraqi counterparts, but also Americans and to support American businesses in the years to come, as we do in our diplomatic – especially our commercial diplomatic work all over the world. And so it’s time for the United States to start thinking of Iraq as a business opportunity. And the sacrifice that the Iraqi people have made for your freedom is one that we highly respect.

According to the IMF, Iraq is projected to grow faster than China in the next two years. Now, let me repeat that, because when I read it I said, okay, are you sure because we always think of China as being the juggernaut? But no, indeed, Iraq is projected to grow faster than China.

Secretary Clinton’s comments to the corporate leaders gathered at the Business Forum Promoting



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Commercial Opportunities in Iraq, make it clear that there is more than just the elimination of al-Qaeda behind America's willingness to give millions of dollars and thousands of lives to the establishment of an American suzerainty in Baghdad. There is the expansion of the American Empire and the concomitant promotion of the IMF.

Despite what some commentators may suggest, it is unlikely that President Obama will be dissuaded by the appearance of reneging on campaign promises to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or by the death of five American soldiers in Iraq last week from pressing for a long-term American future in Iraq.



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