



Written by on August 31, 2010

(Supposed) End of U.S. Combat Role in Iraq

Speaking in a television address broadcast nationally just hours before the formal end of U.S. combat operations in Iraq on August 31, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki told the nation it was a "bright day for the people of Iraq."

The Middle East-based [al Jazeera](#) news network quoted al-Maliki's statement that the drawdown of U.S. troops "restored Iraq's sovereignty." Al-Maliki called the reduction and designated mission change of the troops a victory for Iraq, saying: "It's a day that Iraq gained back its sovereignty. Iraq is now its own master. Our forces will take the lead and command combat operations after this withdrawal."



Al Jazeera noted that the 2008 status-of-forces agreement between the U.S. and Iraqi governments requires all American forces to be withdrawn from Iraq by the end of 2011 and cited a statement from al-Maliki that he expects the United States will meet that timetable.

"We were sure ... that the withdrawal will take place, and we are committed to implement the final and complete withdrawal by the end of next year," he said.

[Reuters news](#) reported that U.S. troop levels were cut to 50,000 before the August 31 deadline and that the six remaining U.S. brigades will concentrate on training Iraqi police and troops to prepare Iraq to take charge of its own defense by the time all U.S. troops withdraw by the end of next year. The report continued:

Obama promised war-weary U.S. voters he would extricate the United States from the war, launched by [former President George W.] Bush with the stated aim of destroying Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

No such weapons were found. Almost a trillion dollars have been spent and more than 4,400 U.S. soldiers and over 100,000 Iraqi civilians killed since the 2003 invasion.

An article in the [Los Angeles Times](#) for August 30, "U.S. troops in Iraq go from shock and awe to 'advise and assist'" interviewed troops stationed with the Army's 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Infantry Division about the new designation:

For this combat unit, many of whose members stormed into Baghdad seven years ago, a war that began with shock and awe is ending with "advise and assist."

That's the new label being given to the six brigades that will be left in Iraq, even if all of them are made up of combat soldiers.

"It sounds like it's semantics, but it's not," 2nd Battalion commander Lt. Col. Gregory Sierra said of the name change. "What we do is completely different. I am an infantryman. We are a combat



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brigade. But we're assigned as an advise and assist brigade."

Troops offer Iraqi soldiers advice, and assist them, but only if asked. "Gone are the days where we had to grab three [Iraqi] soldiers and say, 'We're going outside the wire.' That does not happen," Sierra said.

In an August 31 report, [CNN](#) quoted from a column written for the *Wall Street Journal* by Noah Feldman, identified as an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a former senior adviser to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. Feldman wrote: "Iraq faces a raft of difficulties if it is to become an effective, self-governing nation, and all of them point to the need for a continuing U.S. role in security and beyond."

Feldman's analysis, entitled "[A Very Long Engagement](#)," carried an ominous subhead: "It took 35 years for democracy to take hold in South Korea, and U.S. troops could be in Iraq just as long. Noah Feldman on why the draw-down is a beginning and not an end."

After recounting that following the cessation of hostilities on the Korean peninsula in 1953, President Eisenhower left tens of thousands of troops behind, and signed a treaty with the South Korean government to formalize their presence, Feldman repeated the 35-year timeframe required for South Korea to emerge "as a stable democracy."

Feldman did not explain how these actions (or a U.S. presence in Korea in the first place without a congressional declaration of war) were among the powers granted to any presidential administration by our Constitution, but this is not surprising, given his association with the internationalist-minded Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Members of the CFR have dominated U.S. foreign policy since World War II, an influence to which many observers attribute our 60-years-plus history of involvement in one undeclared war after another.

Among the CFR members instrumental in formulating U.S. policy from Korea through Iraq were Truman administration Secretaries of State Dean Acheson and George Marshall; President Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles; John Kennedy and his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk; Bill Clinton and his Secretaries of State Warren Christopher and Madeline Albright, both CFR members; George W. Bush administration: Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who has continued on in the Obama administration. Under the leadership of these individuals, and others, the United States has sent troops without a congressional declaration of war to Korea, Vietnam, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Considered in this historical context, Noah Feldman's following words are not surprising:

The situation in Iraq today bears some intriguing similarities [to that at the time of the cease-fire in Korea]. The reduction of American forces in Iraq to 50,000 is thus good news — but not because it is a step closer to complete withdrawal. In the coming year, the Iraqi government (once it is formed) is likely to ask the U.S. to keep some significant number of troops in the country after the pullout date of summer 2011. If so, President Obama may well agree, because it is just about the only way to avoid a resurgence of civil war and continue Iraq's tenuous progress toward consolidating democracy. As in South Korea — where nearly 30,000 U.S. troops remain today, almost 60 years after the war ended — patience may pay off. Then there is the ethical side of the issue: If the elected Iraqi government asks for help, the U.S. owes it to them to continue its commitment.

Feldman's history is impeccable; his conclusions based on that history are indefensible. First, in what



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sense would the almost unlimited patience of the American people “pay off”? What does our nation have to show — in its own interests — for having lost the lives of over 53,000 of its finest soldiers in Korea and for the cost of maintaining thousands more troops for almost 60 years?

What — again in America’s interests — was achieved by having lost another 58,000 lives in Vietnam?

And what has been achieved by the loss of 4,400 more lives in Iraq and 1,100 in Afghanistan, with more added as we write?

And Feldman writes: “If the elected Iraqi government asks for help, the U.S. owes it to them to continue its commitment.” (Emphasis added.)

Where, exactly, in the U.S. Constitution, does it state that the government of the United States has the obligation to protect any entity *other than the states* against invasion?

In the meantime, maybe all IOUs signed by government officials connected with the CFR should be mailed to Feldman and his associates at the CFR’s headquarters in New York.

Read also:

[In Defiance of the Constitution, 49,000 Troops Still Deployed in Iraq](#)

[First U.S. Soldier Killed in Iraq Since “Withdrawal” of Combat Troops](#)

[Iraq “Withdrawal”: Building Hillary Clinton an Army](#)

Photo: U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, left, walks with Gen. Ray Odierno, right, as he arrived in Baghdad, Iraq on Aug. 30, 2010.: AP Images



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