



Written by on January 6, 2009

## U.S. Transfers Power to Iraq

During the formal handover ceremony held at the former palace of Saddam Hussein on January 1, Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki observed: "A year before it was just a dream to think about foreign troops withdrawing from Iraq but today that dream has become a reality. It is our right to consider this day the day of sovereignty and the beginning of the process of retrieving every inch of our nation's soil," said Maliki as the Iraqi flag was hoisted at the palace's entrance.



"The palace is the sign of Iraqi sovereignty and it is a message to all Iraqis that our sovereignty has returned."

The palace had served as a combination U.S. embassy and military headquarters since the ouster of Saddam by U.S. forces in 2003.

At another ceremony held on January 4 in the Green Zone to commemorate the 88th anniversary of the Iraqi army, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani said: "Today we are more optimistic and hopeful because the new democratic Iraq will be an example for the region, in building democracy and the state of law."

"The army will defend the unity, people, soil and sky of Iraq," continued Talabani.

Iraqi Defense Minister Abdel Qader Jassem Mohammed said Iraq was prepared for that task and he told AFP news: "This day shows that we are going in the right direction and we have the abilities to take care of our security issues."

"We are ready to take over security completely by the end of 2011," said the minister.

On January 3, the U.S. military also moved out of Forward Operating Base Callahan in northern Baghdad, which Iraqi officials said will be dismantled and converted back into a shopping mall.

Reuters news service reported that Brigadier General Robin Swan, deputy commander of U.S. forces in Baghdad, described the transfer of the base as "tremendously significant."

"By June 30th, combat formations are out of the cities. This was a major forward operating base, with 600 soldiers . . . three short weeks ago," said General Swan.

The *Washington Post* reported on January 2 that Iraqi and American officials had announced the previous day that U.S. soldiers would continue to help maintain security in Baghdad for at least the next 90 days.

"We are not losing our jobs — they are just changing," said Col. Steve Ferrari, commander of the Joint Area Support Group, told the *Post*. Ferrari said that U.S. troops will follow Iraqi orders, noting: "If they tell us to go, we will go. If they tell us to stay, we will stay."

Simultaneous with the U.S. handover of the Green Zone, British forces in southern Iraq turned over Basra airport to the Iraqis. During a ceremony held at the airport, Basra's provincial governor



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Mohammed Masbah al-Waeli stated: "This is a great and important day during which Basra airport control tower and the entire airport was turned over by the British to us."

As the transfer of power back to Iraq progressed, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki made his fourth visit to Iran since he took office in 2006, where he met with Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. A report in the *Gulf Daily News* (Bahrain) for January 5 noted that on the previous day, Khamenei warned Maliki against the security pact with the United States. Quoting from a report by the official IRNA news agency, the article noted that the Iranian leader told Maliki:

Americans do not have a real friendship even with their close allies in the region, so their promises should not and cannot be trusted. The presence of US and British forces in Iraq is the main source of terrorism and internal disputes. One of the US's main objectives is to create a base for a long term presence and rule in the region.

The *Gulf Daily News* reported that Maliki expressed hope that Iran would help rebuild Iraq by boosting economic ties, and told reporters in Iran:

We agreed to set up a joint service contract company with Iran ... when Iraq witnesses stability and when the national unity government starts the reconstruction. I personally hope that trade ties between the two countries will focus on quicker reconstruction and progress in Iraq.

Maliki noted that Iraq and Iran also agreed to establish a high-ranking joint committee to help build economic ties between the two nations. The committee will be headed by Iraqi Commerce Minister Abdul Falah Al Sudani and Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki.

The *News* also reported that following the turnover of its previous facilities to the Iraqis, the United States opened its new \$700 million embassy in Baghdad's Green Zone on January 5.



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