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Despite Violence in Iraq, U.S. Drawdown Should Remain on Schedule

| [More](#)^[1]

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A wave of violence spread across Iraq^[3] today with 70 dead and some 300 injured^[4]. Iraqi security forces are blaming al Qaida affiliates, but no group has officially claimed responsibility. The *New York Times* puts the events in context:

Coming a little less than two weeks after the Iraqi government said it would negotiate with the United States about keeping some of its 48,000 troops here after the end of the year, the violence raised significant questions about the capabilities of the Iraqi security forces.

This is indeed a tragic loss of life, but this level of violence actually has become less common and usually occurs when the Iraqi government is making important decisions on the future of the country and U.S. troop presence. Each time a bomb is detonated in Iraq, commentators argue that it proves we cannot leave Iraq yet; the job is not done.

If the job isn't done, it should be. And soon. There will certainly be violence in Iraq for the foreseeable future, but a U.S. troop presence is not going to prevent these horrific incidents and often serves as a pretext for them. The continued violence shouldn't obscure one unalterable fact: the Iraqis must solve their internal security problems. That, in turn, will likely require them to also solve their political problems, something that they have so far refused to do.

As Ted Galen Carpenter and Doug Bandow have^[5] explained^[6], those calling for an extended U.S. presence in Iraq base their arguments on faulty logic that is devoid of serious considerations about strategic U.S. interests in the region. The most committed of the stay longer/forever crowd hopes our presence in Iraq will resemble that of U.S. troops in South Korea or Germany. But this isn't only a false analogy; it is based on false

premises ^[7] about vital U.S. interests: namely, that the U.S. government, and U.S. taxpayers, should be responsible for the security of other countries.

Those who worry about us leaving too soon/ever shouldn't fret too much, however. Regardless of what happens in the negotiations over an extension of the U.S. troop presence, the United States will still maintain a staff of 17,000 employees ^[8] (including contractors) based out of the world's largest embassy ^[9].

Through it all, President Obama has been relatively silent. He has claimed that we are "winding down" the nation's wars, but the prospect of tens of thousands of Americans remaining in Iraq hardly constitutes an end-game there. And no one knows what sort of long-term presence the president has in mind for Afghanistan.

President Obama won the presidency due in part to his opposition to the Iraq war at a time when most other politicians were either supportive or silent. This stand allowed him to build credibility with the American people, despite his relative lack of foreign policy experience. While other so-called experts were calling for war, he was concerned that the Iraq war was likely to undermine American and regional security, cost hundreds of billions of dollars, and claim many tens of thousands of lives. Tragically, he was correct.

The combat mission may have ended, but Americans are still dying ^[10] in Iraq. It is time for the President and his administration to keep the promise of ending U.S. military involvement there, and hasten the day when Iraqis are fully responsible for their own affairs.

More by

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[2] <http://nationalinterest.org/profile/christopher-preble>

[3] http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/more-than-70-killed-in-attacks-across-iraq/2011/08/15/gIQAHYtWGJ_story.html

[4] <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/16/world/middleeast/16iraq.html>

[5] <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/us-masochism-trying-stay-iraq-afghanistan-5728>

[6] <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/leave-iraq-to-the-iraqis/>

[7] <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/no-mr-secretary-it-is-not-in-americas-interest-to-stay-in-iraq/>

[8] <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/on-not-leaving-iraq/>

[9] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7811088.stm

[10] <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/01/world/middleeast/01baghdad.html>