

Business as Usual in Iraq: The War Operation has been Downsized and Re-branded.

50,000 U.S. troops remain in Iraq

By [Prof. Marjorie Cohn](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Last week, President Obama ceremoniously announced that U.S. combat operations had ended in Iraq. As Democrats face an uphill battle in the upcoming midterm elections, Obama felt he had to make good on his campaign promise to move the fighting from Iraq to Afghanistan. But while he has escalated the killing in Afghanistan, it's business as usual in Iraq.

The United States, with its huge embassy in Baghdad and five large bases throughout Iraq, will continue to pull the strings there. Last week, Vice President Biden delivered a power-sharing plan to the Iraqis, who have been unable to form a government in the six months since the March election resulted in a stalemate. "We think that's better for the future of Iraq," Biden declared. The New York Times speculated about whether "the Americans can close the deal." But the United States will continue to do a lot more than simply make suggestions about how Iraqis should share political power.

The timing of Obama's announcement that combat troops are leaving Iraq is based on the status of forces agreement (SOFA) the Bush administration negotiated with the Iraqis in 2008. It calls for U.S. combat troops to leave Iraq by August 31, 2010. The SOFA also requires the Pentagon to withdraw all of its forces by the end of 2011, but this date may be extended.

Obama's speech about withdrawing combat troops from Iraq is an effort to demonstrate compliance with the SOFA as the midterm elections draw near. But events on the ground reveal that he is playing a political version of the old shell game. As Obama proclaimed the redeployment of a Stryker battalion out of Iraq, 3,000 combat troops from the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment redeployed back into Iraq from Fort Hood, Texas. And that cavalry regiment will have plenty of company. The State Department is more than doubling its "security contractors" to 7,000 to make sure U.S. interests are protected. And with them will come 24 Blackhawk helicopters, 50 Mine Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles and other military equipment.

Fifty thousand U.S. military troops remain in Iraq. Forty-five hundred U.S. special forces troops continue to fight and kill with Iraqi special forces. American troops are still authorized to take preemptive action against any threat they perceive. The policy regarding air strikes and bombings will remain unchanged. And untold numbers of "civilian contractors" – more accurately called mercenaries – will stay in Iraq, unaccountable for their war crimes.

When Obama spoke to the nation about ending combat operations in Iraq, he delivered his message with a spin that would make George W. Bush proud. Obama renamed the U.S. occupation of Iraq “Operation New Dawn,” and talked of the sacrifices we made during “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” But he failed to mention the more than 100,000 dead Iraqis, the untold numbers of wounded Iraqis and the 2 million Iraqis who went into exile. He said nothing about the few hours per day that most Iraqis enjoy electricity. He neglected to note that unions have been outlawed and Iraq’s infrastructure is in shambles. And he omitted any reference to the illegality of Bush’s war of aggression – in violation of the UN Charter – and Bush’s policy of torture and abuse of Iraqis – in violation of the Geneva Conventions. Obama chose instead to praise his predecessor, saying, “No one could doubt President Bush’s . . . commitment to our security.” But foreign occupation of Iraq and mistreatment of prisoners never made us more secure.

Obama also failed to remind us that we went to war based on two lies by the Bush administration: that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and that al Qaeda was in bed with Saddam Hussein.

Obama spoke of “credible elections” in Iraq. But “Iraq does not have a functional democracy,” said Raed Jarrar, Iraq consultant for American Friends Service Committee and a senior fellow at Peace Action. “We cannot expect to have a functional democracy from Iraq that was imposed by a foreign occupation,” he said on Democracy Now!

“The new Iraqi state is among the most corrupt in the world,” journalist Nir Rosen wrote in Foreign Policy. “It is only effective at being brutal and providing a minimum level of security. It fails to provide adequate services to its people, millions of whom are barely able to survive. Iraqis are traumatized. Every day there are assassinations with silenced pistols and the small magnetic car bombs known as sticky bombs.”

Obama put the cost of the wars at \$3 trillion, an awesome sum that could well be used to provide universal health care, quality education, and improved infrastructure to create jobs in this country. But he overlooked the cost of treating our disabled veterans, many of whom return with traumatic brain injury and post traumatic stress disorder. “There is no question that the Iraq war added substantially to the federal debt,” Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes wrote in the Washington Post. “The global financial crisis was due, at least in part, to the war,” they added.

Regardless of how Obama tries to spin his message about the disaster the United States has created in Iraq, 60 percent of Americans think the U.S. invasion of Iraq was a mistake, 70 percent believe it wasn’t worth sacrificing American lives, and only one quarter feel it made us safer. The majority of Iraqis also oppose the U.S. occupation.

As I ponder events unfolding in Iraq, and Obama’s efforts to explain them to us, I am reminded of the highly decorated Marine Corps General Smedley Butler. Nearly 70 years ago he declared that, “War is a racket.” He was referring to the use of Marines in Central America during the early 20th Century to protect U.S. corporations like United Fruit, which were exploiting agricultural resources in that region. In my view, the Iraq war had a similar purpose – to secure the rich Iraqi oil fields and make them available to corporations that will continue to feed America’s petroleum addiction.

In a more honest speech, Obama would have said we successfully removed a leader who was unfriendly to American geopolitical and economic interests and replaced him with

people beholden to U.S. money and materiel. U.S. forces have been downsized and re-branded. The “enduring presence posts” (new nomenclature for U.S. bases in Iraq) will ensure that we maintain hegemony in Iraq. Mission accomplished.

Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law and past president of the National Lawyers Guild. The author of “Cowboy Republic: Six Ways the Bush Gang Has Defied the Law,” she is deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. See www.marjoriecohn.com.

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