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## Will the US Really Pull Out of Iraq?

By: Eric Mangolis

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President Barack Obama just restated his vow to pull all US combat troops out of Iraq by August, 2010, and the remaining US garrison by the end of 2011. While campaigning for the presidency, Obama had promised to withdraw all US troops in 2010, but the Pentagon prevailed on him to extend the date.

Has America's long goodbye to Iraq really begun?

Perhaps. But don't bet on it.

The 50,000 US troops left until 2011 will supposedly "advise and assist" and perform "anti-terrorism" missions and training. To this old war correspondent and military historian, that sounds an awful lot like the British Empires employment of native troops under white officers.

These remaining US troops will likely be six armor-heavy combat brigades, backed by warplanes from US air bases in the Gulf. A US brigade withdrawn from Iraq will go to neighboring Kuwait. Most of the rest will transfer to Afghanistan.

No word about the fate of 85,000 US-paid mercenaries (aka "contractors") in Iraq.

Under the current status of forces agreement between the US and Iraq, the US retains all air rights over Iraq. How long this will continue is uncertain. But it will be a key bellwether of Washington's intentions since air power is the key to US military power around the globe. Any Israeli attack on Iran would most likely pass through Iraqi air space.

In his impressive new book, "Oil," writer Tom Bower notes America's trinity is "God, guns and gasoline." Iraq's oil reserves are an estimated 112 billion barrels, the world's second largest after Saudi Arabia. Canada ranks third. Iraq also has vast natural gas reserves, an increasingly important fuel and raw material. Oil-hungry India and China are eying Iraq.

America's once mighty oil firms, the "seven sisters," have been elbowed out of most of the world's oil fields by nationalist governments and replaced by state petroleum companies. Iraq's ruler, Saddam Hussein, kicked US, British and French oil firms out of Iraq, and so sealed his fate. Big Oil moved back into Iraq behind invading US troops in 2003, and is taking over Iraq's oil production and exporting.

The US does not yet need Iraq's oil, but controlling it gives the US potent influence over its importers, such as China, India, Japan and Europe. Control of Mideast oil remains a pillar of US geopolitical world power.

It seems unlikely the US will cut Iraq loose. Washington seems to be following the same control model set up in the 1920's by the British Empire to secure Mesopotamia's oil. Namely: install a puppet ruler, create a native army to protect him, leave some British troops and strong RAF units in desert bases ready to bomb any miscreants who disturbed the Pax Britannica – and keep cheap oil flowing.

Washington is building a US \$740 million new embassy in Baghdad for 800 personnel, as well as giant new fortified embassies in Kabul and Islamabad, Pakistan (cost \$1 billion) that may hold 1,000 "diplomats." Osama bin Laden calls them, "Crusader Fortresses."

The US hopes the Shia Maliki regime it installed in Baghdad will keep a lid on Iraq while allowing almost independent Kurdistan to remain a Kuwait-like US protectorate. But given Iraq's fractured history, this seems unlikely.

American "liberation" left Iraq politically, economically, and socially shattered, "killed" in the words of former foreign minister, Tariq Aziz. Republicans in the US crow about victory in Iraq thanks to the famous military "surge" advocated by John McCain, but this canard hides the grim truth.

Reputable studies estimate Iraq's death toll at mid-hundreds of thousands to one million, not counting claims by UN observers that 500,000 Iraqi children died from disease as a result of the US-led embargo before 2003.

Four million Sunni Iraqis remain refugees, half abroad, victims of Shia ethnic cleansing. Death squads haunt the land.

Washington spends untold millions bribing Sunni fighters to lay down their arms.

Large numbers of Iraqi doctors and scientists have been murdered – many Iraqis believe, without any hard evidence, by Israel's Mossad. A maze of US-built concrete walls cut up and control major cities. Electricity only sputters a few hours daily in 40 C heat. Cancers from depleted uranium fired by US cannon are becoming epidemic, as they are in Afghanistan.

"They create a desert, and call it peace," as Tacitus memorably said of Rome's final solutions.

Iran, fearful of attack by the US, also played an important role in damping down resistance to the US occupation by ordering Iraq's Shia militia, the Mehdi Army, to cease fire and temporarily cooperate with the Maliki regime.

If all US troops are removed, the Maliki sock puppet regime won't last long. A real Iraqi regime nationalist would likely re-nationalize oil, rearm, rebuild the ruined nation and rejoin the Arab confrontation against Israel. Or, Iran would end up dominating much of oil-rich Shia Iraq. It's unlikely Washington would accept either outcome.

Iraqi armed resistance to foreign occupation has abated as the pullout date nears. US casualties have fallen sharply because US troops are being kept on their bases. But this could quickly change.

The highest-ranking surviving Ba'ath Party leader, Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, just declared a new push against the occupiers and their Shia allies.