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U.S. needs to completely withdraw from Iraq

By Adil E. Shamoo and Bonnie Bricker, June 13, 2011

Don't count on the United States to withdraw its 47,000 troops from Iraq by the end of this year, as President Obama has promised.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates, along with other Obama administration officials, has exerted tremendous pressure on the Iraqi government to "ask" the United States to keep troops in Iraq. Neither Iraqis nor Americans signed up for this kind of a deal: the permanent occupation of Iraq.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is trying to satisfy this American goal of remaining in Iraq while simultaneously attempting to placate his domestic allies who want our forces to leave entirely.

Iraqis from disparate groups have formed a large nationalist movement against occupation and have demanded that the U.S. government keep its pledge to completely exit Iraq by the end of this year. The U.S. government blames the anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr for this movement. But this is simplistic and misleading. Al-Sadr is responding to strongly held sentiments in Iraq. That's why he can marshal 70,000 demonstrators to rally for withdrawal. What's more, tens of thousands of other Iraqis have already joined anti-occupation movements that al-Sadr does not lead.

Candidate Obama promised the American people that U.S. troops would leave Iraq as soon as possible if he were elected president. Then, after winning the election, he pledged to bring all troops home by the end of this year, as required by the Status of Forces Agreement that President Bush negotiated with Iraq.

But even if President Obama withdraws all our troops, which seems improbable today, the United States would still have tens of thousands of private contractors there, along with a huge embassy. Last February, Congress authorized the State

Department to increase its embassy staff in Iraq to 17,000. This is by far the largest contingency of American embassy personnel in the world. The embassy compound is actually an enclosed and fully functioning city within Baghdad. Embassy staff will also be placed at five additional locations across Iraq, and the embassy will operate 24 helicopters and 19 planes.

Millions voted for Mr. Obama — not Hillary Clinton — in the Democratic primaries because of Obama's clear opposition to the war in Iraq and his intent for a quick withdrawal. But President Obama is not keeping his word.

Adil E. Shamoo is a senior analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus, writing on ethics and public policy, and is a professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. **Bonnie Bricker** is a teacher and writer. They can be reached at pmproj@progressive.org.