

For War or Peace

Issues of war and peace in the twenty first century

In Iraq, occupation by another name Adil E. Shamoo

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Even as embassy population is reduced, America is projecting power by adding CIA personnel and Special Operations

By Adil E. Shamoo

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Two recent reports appearing on the same day last week in [The New York Times](#) and [The Washington Post](#) illustrate U.S. intentions in [Iraq](#). What they reveal is that despite the heralded "end" of U.S. participation in the war there, U.S. policy continues to depend on our security apparatus to influence Iraq, at the expense of Iraqis' sovereignty and dignity.

The Times report informed us that the U.S. State Department decided to cut the U.S. embassy staff by 50 percent from its current 16,000 personnel. This is a good decision; the U.S. embassy in [Baghdad](#) is the largest in the world. The reason given for the decision is primarily to reduce the American footprint in Iraq with the hope of reducing Iraqi hostility toward these evident remnants of occupation.

The second report, in the Post, informs us that the U.S. is significantly ramping up the number of [CIA](#) personnel and covert Special Operations forces in order to make up for reducing the American military and diplomatic footprint. These added covert personnel will be distributed in safe houses in urban centers all across the country. This represents a new way to exert U.S. power, but it is betting on the Iraqis not noticing the increased covert personnel. Really? This is a bad decision as it contradicts the reasons for the decision to reduce embassy staff.

The Iraqis have suffered for nine years as a result of the U.S. invasion and occupation. The economic, educational and political systems in Iraq have been destroyed. Sectarianism, contrary to the belief of many in the U.S., has become the order of the day since the invasion. A significant percentage of Iraqis do not like us and do not want us to stay in Iraq. No Iraqi politicians want to openly be identified as pro-American.

Animosity toward the U.S. is on the rise because of the heavy U.S. presence in Iraq. Our projects in Iraq function to serve our interests, such as building and training security forces to keep the Iraqis in check (building the infrastructure for the promotion of democracy has taken a back seat). We have made sure that Iraq, for the foreseeable future, will depend on us for security equipment and spare parts, heavy industrial machinery, and banking. We built Iraq's security forces but made sure

it has no air force. And the half-hearted democracy we built is a shambles; graft and corruption are still rampant.

Iraqis can tell the difference between mutually beneficial programs and those that create the impression that the U.S. is powerful and can do what it wants in Iraq.

Four years ago, on this page, I speculated that the massive U.S. embassy being built in Baghdad would be pillaged by angry Iraqis blaming the U.S. for destroying their country. In a follow-up article, I suggested that as a goodwill gesture, the embassy be converted into a university staffed primarily by volunteers from the Iraqi expatriates community in the U.S. The conversion of the embassy into a university surely would not cost a large portion of the embassy's current \$6 billion budget. Such an institution, filling much of the compound's soon-to-be-vacated space, would serve the U.S. interest much better than boots on the ground (or in safe houses) and turn a new page in our relationship with the Iraqi people.

U.S. policy in Iraq is in need of a wholesale change — not a ramping up of covert operations and certainly not in urban centers. All of the ingredients of Arab awakening are alive and well in Iraq. U.S. policy needs to realize this and build on it, not implement policies that denigrate Iraqi aspirations, hopes and autonomy.

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