

Global News Blog

Troop withdrawal: Obama to end Iraq war by August 2010

Speaking from North Carolina's Camp Lejeune, where thousands of Marines are preparing to deploy to Afghanistan, the president's message was clear: We have a new priority.



Speaking of US soldiers killed in Iraq, Obama told Marines at Camp Lejeune today, 'They live on in the memories of those who wear your uniform, in the hearts of those they loved, and in the freedom of the nation they served.'

(Jim Young/Reuters)

By Christa Case Bryant, Staff writer

posted February 27, 2009 at 1:02 pm EST

The venue speaks volumes.

President Obama announced today his plans for withdrawing US troops from Iraq. He did it from North Carolina's Camp Lejeune, where thousands of Marines are preparing to deploy to Afghanistan. (You can read his speech [here](#).)

This is as much a message to Americans as it is Europeans: We have a new priority.

Mr. Obama has already made clear to European countries that he'd like to see a more robust NATO presence in Afghanistan to fight the Taliban, whose influence has been growing steadily in many regions.

In signaling an end of Iraq combat missions by Aug. 31, 2010, Obama is compromising between his campaign promise to withdraw within 16 months – showing his willingness to listen to his military commanders, some of whom had pressed for a later deadline.

The situation in Iraq has improved dramatically due to three factors:

- The US and Iraqi military surge
- Many Sunnis turning against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to work with US forces
- Cease-fire among the Shiite militia known as the Mahdi Army

In a forward-looking piece that kicked off the Monitor's 2009 Iraq coverage, the Monitor's Jane Arraf noted that the number of Iraqis killed in attacks dropped more than 50 percent in 2008 from the year before – though the rate is still high: an estimated 6,700 to 8,000 Iraqi deaths.

How fragile is Iraq's progress?

But some experts are concerned that that progress toward greater security could be reversed when US troops withdraw. Austin Long, a counterinsurgency expert at the RAND Corp. in Washington, told the Monitor's Tom Peter recently:

Home to all three of Iraq's major ethnic groups – Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds – Diyala is one area where AIQ has sought to pit rivals against each other to create a power vacuum, Mr. Long added.

But Iraqi residents in Yusufiyah, where American forces have largely left already, are more optimistic. An Iraqi Army officer told Tom, on condition of anonymity anonymously because he is not authorized to speak to the media:

Obama addressed the question directly, stating directly, 'Iraq is not secure.' He went on to say:

Logistical challenge

Another challenge of the withdrawal is how to move the significant amount of equipment now in Iraq, which the Monitor recently tallied to include: 60,000 aircraft and vehicles, 120,000 trailer-sized containers, and 150,000 private contractors from nearly 50 bases and installations.

One option might be to send some personnel and equipment via Turkey, where the two-lane Habur Gate crossing has been used quietly as a way to move supplies.

According to the Status of Forces Agreement, a US-Iraqi deal settled on at the end of 2008, a US military presence is allowed for up to three more years. But US units are supposed to draw back from Iraqi cities to US bases by this summer, and Obama's plan now indicates an earlier withdrawal of the bulk of the troops by August 2010. In keeping with the deal, Obama promised today that the remaining 50,000 troops – a bigger number than Democrats were expecting – will leave by 2011.

Material from the wires was used in this report.

© The Christian Science Monitor. All Rights Reserved. **Terms** under which this service is provided to you. **Privacy Policy**.