

## Extra Feature Story

### **Iraqis, U.S. Military Negotiate Future of American Troop Presence**

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**Heated debates in the Iraqi cabinet have stalled negotiations over a deal allowing 150,000 U.S. troops to stay in the country after a United Nations mandate expires December 31.**

The U.S. military is warning Iraq that if it doesn't come to an agreement on the terms allowing U.S. troops to stay in the country for three years, military operations and services — including education, economic support and protection of oil exports -- could be shut down on Jan. 1.

After months of negotiations, President George Bush agreed to a "date goal" of final U.S. troop withdrawal by 2011.

But some political parties may be stalling until a new president is elected on Nov. 4. "We cannot rule out the possibility that there are some groups that want to delay the issue until after the U.S. elections," prominent Kurdish lawmaker Mahmoud Othman told The Associated Press.

"They think that it is better to deal or to reach a better understanding with the new administration and they are not in a hurry."

#### **The proposal**

The proposed pact requires all U.S. combat forces to be removed from Iraqi cities by June of 2009, and for all troops to leave the country by the end of 2011. The Iraqi government is seeking to regain some of its sovereignty by limiting U.S. power in the country.

Iraq would have some legal jurisdiction over American soldiers and contractors, who are currently immune from trial in Iraqi courts. This issue was highlighted in 2007 when U.S. contract workers shot and killed civilians in Baghdad, creating an outcry by the Iraqi people.

Under the agreement, troops would also need an Iraqi warrant before searching houses or detaining people, unless they were engaged in active combat.

#### **The United Nations mandate**

The U.S. military and allied forces are currently in Iraq under a United Nations mandate that will expire at the end of this year. The mandate allows the multi-national forces to "take all necessary measures to preserve peace and security" in Iraq.

When the one year mandate was renewed in December of 2007, the United Nations said it was for the last time.

Without a decision on the proposed agreement or an extension of the existing mandate, the U.S. military would have to suspend operations in Iraq because there would be no legal basis for their presence.

#### **The Iraqi Cabinet**

The Iraqi Cabinet has 37 members and is made up of people from both the Shiite and Sunni Muslim sects as well as Kurds, who live mostly in the northern region of the country and have long sought their own nation.

The only political group that has come out in favor of the U.S. agreement so far is the Kurdish alliance. Several Iraqi leaders have opposed the pact, especially radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

### **The next president's Iraq plans**

The security agreement in its current form would limit the flexibility of the next U.S. president. The presidential candidates, Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain, have set out different agendas for the war.

Obama has called for a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq by the summer of 2010 and has set a goal of ending the war. He would leave a residual force in the country to carry out counter-terrorism missions, but would not have permanent bases.

Under the potential agreement, Obama could carry out his plan and order troop reductions before the deadlines without being in violation of the agreement.

McCain has staunchly opposed setting a deadline for U.S. troop withdrawal, saying it is akin to scheduling a defeat. In January he said that it would not matter if American troops were in Iraq for 50 or even 100 years if the country was stable and the American military was not suffering casualties.

More recently he said the war could be won by 2013, but maintains that a premature withdrawal could have "calamitous consequences to the Iraqi people."

**-- Compiled by Talea Miller for NewsHour Extra**

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