

Remembering the First End of the War in Iraq

On the 10th anniversary of the end of Operation New Dawn, America's involvement in Iraq may finally be coming to an end

Dec 15, 2021

WASHINGTON — On a bright, sunny December day in 2011, in a hangar on Pope Field, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, then-President Barack Obama addressed a crowd of service members, military families, VIPs and media packed into the space."

Tomorrow, the colors of United States Forces Iraq, the colors you fought under, will be formally cased in a ceremony in Baghdad," he said. "America's war in Iraq will be over."

Up until that point, most declarations about the end of combat operations seemed to be more of a way to flag the critics of the war to progress being made. Mission success announcements going back to the to the beginning of the war like the transfer of the Green Zone, end of the Surge, the establishment of the permanent Iraqi government, the success of the elections, and the capture of Saddam Hussein all seemed to signal the end was near. Who can forget President George W. Bush's 2003 address aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln with the "Mission Accomplished" banner in the background? However, for the "Boots on the Ground" who would deploy to Iraq over and over again, peace was a long way off.

Nevertheless, by 2011, despite an uncertain future for Iraq, the U.S. military had its orders to complete its withdraw. On Dec. 15, troops of U.S. Forces – Iraq, led by Commanding General Lloyd J. Austin III, officially retired the colors marking the end of eight years, eight months and 26 days of operations in Iraq. Three days later, with the exception of those assigned to the U.S. Embassy mission in Baghdad, the last convoy of American service members departed country and Operation New Dawn came to a close. During the course of the war in Iraq, more than 1.5 million service members would serve supporting Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn. The conflict would result in more than 32,000 U.S. service members wounded and 4,486 who would pay the ultimate sacrifice. For the first time since the Global War on Terrorism began more than 10 years earlier, it seemed that the end of

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persistent combat, at least in that part of the world, may actually be near.

The reprieve would be short lived. Sadly, sectarian violence, an Iraqi declared state of emergency and the rapid rise of the deadly terror group known as ISIS left President Obama with no other choice but to send the U.S. military back into Iraq three years later to defend its allies from certain annihilation.

In a Dec. 9, 2021 [press release](#), Combined Joint Task Force – Inherent Resolve announced the “Combat role in Iraq complete,” and the U.S. will complete the withdrawal of all forces with a combat role by the end of the year. It’s an announcement that echoes from a decade ago, but with the finality of this past summer’s withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the final end of America’s military involvement in Iraq may too be a reality.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) would like everyone to join its National Commander Fritz Mihelcic and the combined 1.5 million members of the organization and its Auxiliary in saying “thank you” for the dedication, bravery and selfless service of all veterans of the Iraq War. Let us continue to remember everyone still deployed to Iraq until everyone finally comes home.