

It is not too often I am pleased by the foreign policy announcements from this administration, but last week's announcement that the war in Iraq was in its final stage and all the troops may be home for Christmas did sound promising. I have long said that we should simply declare victory and come home. It should not have taken us nearly a decade to do so, and it was supposed to be a priority for the new administration. Instead, it will be one of the last things done before the critical re-election campaign gets into full swing. Better late than never, but, examining the fine print, is there really much here to get excited about? Are all of our men and women really coming home, and is Iraq now to regain its sovereignty? And in this time of economic crisis, are we going to stop hemorrhaging money in Iraq? Sadly, it doesn't look that way.

First and foremost, any form of withdrawal that is happening is not simply because the administration realized it was the right thing to do. This is not the fulfillment of a campaign promise, or because suddenly the training of their police and military is complete and Iraq is now safe and secure, but because of disagreements with the new government over a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The current agreement was set up by the previous administration to expire at the end of 2011. Apparently the Iraqis refused to allow continued immunity from prosecution for our forces for any crimes our soldiers might commit on Iraqi soil. Can you imagine having foreign soldiers here, with immunity from our laws and Constitution, with access to your neighborhood?

Some 39,000 American troops will supposedly be headed home by the end of the year. However, the US embassy in Iraq, which is the largest and most expensive in the world, is not being abandoned. Upwards of 17,000 military personnel and private security contractors will remain in Iraq to guard diplomatic personnel, continue training Iraqi forces, maintain "situational awareness" and other functions. This is still a significant American footprint in the country. And considering that a private security contractor costs the US taxpayer about three times as much as a soldier, we're not going to see any real cost savings. Sadly, these contractors are covered under diplomatic immunity, meaning the Iraqi people will not get the accountability that they were hoping for.

While I applaud the spirit of this announcement - since all our troops should come home from overseas - I have strong reservations about any actual improvements in the situation in Iraq, since plans are already being made to increase the number of troops in surrounding regions. What we really need is a new foreign policy and there is no indication that that is what we have gotten. On the contrary, the administration fully intends to keep troops in Iraq, indefinitely, under a new agreement, while the Iraqis are doing their best to assert their sovereignty and kick us out. Neither are we going to be saving any significant amount of

money. My greatest fear, however, is that this troop withdrawal from Iraq will simply pave the way for more endless, wasteful, needless wars.