US Soldiers Close Bases and Head out of Iraq

Difficulty:
AVERAGE

Date of release:
Tuesday 20th December 2011

Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about US troops leaving Iraq. How long have they been there? When will their departure be completed?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = How long have American troops been in Iraq? Has the pullout already started? When is it planned to be completed?

1. What do we learn in the report about the pullout of American troops from Iraq?

   - 1000's of soldiers have already left.
   - The last soldiers will be gone by the end of the year.
   - They are leaving via Kuwait, to where they travel in convoys.
   - The pullout means that 100's of non-military personnel who worked on U.S. bases (many from India, Pakistan and Nepal) must also leave.
   - Military chiefs consider that the drawdown "has gone well" and that they are "professionally pulling out of the country".

2. What is the U.S. military doing with the equipment and bases it had in Iraq?

   - It is almost certainly repatriating military equipment in good working order, but...
   - it is leaving behind $200 million worth of equipment.
   - The equipment left behind includes 100's of "beat up cars and pickup trucks".
   - It would have cost more to ship this equipment than to leave it behind.
   - At least one large U.S. base has been taken over by the Iraqi military ("the Imam Ali Airfield").

   Have you any idea of the cost of the military presence in Iraq to the United States? (The Congressional Budget Office has estimated $1.9 trillion. Other estimates, from reliable sources and based on conservative assumptions arrive at more than $3 trillion. In terms of deaths to U.S. troops, they are estimated at 4483 soldiers, of which 3531 have been killed in combat). This does not include the 100,000 U.S. soldiers wounded or the 100,000 deaths of Iraqi civilians.

cc BY

3. Can you remember the ranks of the two soldiers you heard in the report, their job and their units?

   - Captain David Moses works at Camp Adder ("the last staging post before Kuwait").
   - He coordinates the final drawdown by verifying the documentation of the convoys that pass through Nasiriyah on their way to Kuwait.
   - Lieutenant Colonel Charles Krumwiede is from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division.
   - He has a high position (presumably in charge of a Combat Team - see next section).

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Units and ranks in the U.S Army.

Do the ranks of the officers in the previous question (Captain, Lieutenant Colonel) mean anything to you? In the U.S. Army, what type of unit are they are charge of and how many soldiers are under their command? Which one has the higher rank and what is the place of each in the chain of command (who gives them orders and who do they give orders to)?

Unit	No. of soldiers	Commanded by
Division	10,000 - 18,000	Major General*
Brigade	3,000 - 4,000	Colonel
Combat Team**	variable	Lieutenant Colonel
Battalion	500 - 600	Lieutenant Colonel
Company	100 - 200	Captain
Platoon	42	Lieutenant
Squad	9 -13	Sergeant

* Just one type of General, who can have from one to five stars. A Major General has two stars.
** A Combat Team is established for a specific military operation and is attached to a Brigade. It contains units from that Brigade but can also contain units from other Brigades, who are under the orders of the commanding Brigade for the duration of the operation. The number of soldiers is usually in the thousands, rather than the hundreds.

Does the structure of your country's army correspond to that of the U.S. Army? What are the equivalents of the units and ranks in your native language? (Use a bilingual dictionary if necessary).

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Iraq war(s).

1. We learn in the report that U.S. troops are leaving "after nine years in Iraq". When and why did they invade Iraq in the first place? Were they alone or part of a coalition of forces? Are they leaving because their objective has been reached or for other reasons? What is the situation in Iraq today?

CC BY

- Iraq was invaded on March 20, 2003 by the United States under the administration of President George W. Bush and the United Kingdom under Prime Minister Tony Blair. The Iraq War is also referred to as the Occupation of Iraq, the Second Gulf War, or Operation Iraqi Freedom by the US military.

- Prior to the invasion, the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom claimed that the possibility of Iraq employing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threatened their security and that of the region. In 2002, the United Nations Security Council demanded that Iraq cooperate with UN weapon inspectors. After many delays, the inspections took place. The inspectors found nothing but reported that it was possible that things had been hidden from them.

- Some U.S. officials also accused Iraqi President Saddam Hussein of supporting al-Qaeda, but no evidence of this was ever found. Other reasons given by the attacking countries included Iraqi government human rights abuse (notably their treatment of the Kurdish population), and an effort to spread democracy to the country. Saddam Hussein was unquestionably a dictator.

- The invasion was a by a multi-national force. Apart from the US and UK, it included Australian, Polish, Korean, Italian, Georgian, Ukranian, Dutch and Spanish troops.

- The invasion took place in the context of widespread popular opposition to the war (between January and April 2003, 36 million people across the globe took part in almost 3,000 protests against war in Iraq).

- The legality of the war has been often questioned. In September 2004, Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, indirectly indicated that the UN had been manipulated and said of the invasion, “From (the UN) point of view, (...) it was illegal.” In November 2008 a former British Law Lord, described the war “a serious violation of international law”, and accused Britain and the U.S. of acting like a “world vigilante”.

- The war came into serious public disrepute in 2004 after the publishing of videos showing the abusive treatment by U.S. soldiers of Iraqi detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison, and in 2007 with the publishing of the “collateral murder” video by Wikileaks showing U.S. military helicopter gunships killing unarmed individuals and then the people who came to pick up their bodies. There have also been many questions about the role of private corporations (e.g. Blackwater) during the U.S. presence in Iraq.

- In the years following the invasion, Iraq fell into a chaotic civil war between Sunnite and Chi’ite factions, which was aggravated by an insurgency against the occupying forces of the coalition.

- In 2005 the Iraqi Transitional Government was established and since 2006, democratic elections have been held, leading to the present Iraqi government. An Iraqi police force and armed forces have also been created.

- Since 2006, apart from the U.S., all the member nations of the original multi-national force have pulled out of Iraq.

- If the war’s objective (but what was the objective?) was the elimination of WMD, they were never found.

- If the war’s objective was the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s régime, it was successful: he was captured in 2003, judged by an Iraqi court and executed in 2006.

cc BY

- If the war's objective was the restoration of democracy, it has been (more or less) successful: Iraq has an elected government, a national police force and its own armed forces. However, questions about the stability of the country remain.

Do you consider that the Iraq War was necessary, that it was legal? Has it achieved its objectives?

2. The Iraq War is also called the "Second Gulf War", what was the first one?

   - A war engaged by a U.N. - authorized coalition force from 34 nations led by the U.S., under the administration of President George H. W. Bush (father of President George W. Bush) against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. It lasted less than 6 months (August 1990 - February 1991). The invasion was also known as "Desert Storm". Find out more here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War

3. In the run-up to the Second Iraq War, President George W. Bush talked about America's "unfinished business" in Iraq. How do you interpret what he meant?

Audioscript

After almost nine years in Iraq, thousands of U.S. troops have already left the country, and the ones remaining will be gone by December 31.

Camp Adder, near the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah, is the last staging post for trucks and soldiers before they arrive in neighboring Kuwait. Captain David Moses is one of the officers coordinating the final drawdown.
"For all the convoys that come through here, the convoy commanders come in and check in with us, we verify their documentation, and if there is anything wrong with the documentation, we correct it on the spot."

Also leaving are hundreds of non-military personnel who worked on the military bases, including those from Pakistan, India and Nepal.

There used to be 12,000 U.S. soldiers here, creating constant traffic on these now-empty streets.

The U.S. military says it is leaving behind some $200 million worth of equipment, including hundreds of beat up cars and pickup trucks. Most of what is being left in Iraq would just cost too much to ship out.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Krumwiede, of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Ist Cavalry Division, says the drawdown has gone well.

"(Yeah) I feel we are honoring that sacrifice by the way we're professionally pulling out of this country."

The Iraqi Air Force has already taken over what used to be a large American base. It is now known as the Imam Ali Airfield.

But most of what is left is dust and concrete, reminders of a long U.S. military presence.

VOA News, Sharon Behn, Nasiriyah.

cc BY