

## **Tennessee Voices: History shows why Iraqis would fear a U.S. stranglehold on them**

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Published: Wednesday, 12/20/06

Since the Iraq Study Group released its report, there has been considerable debate about the group's recommendations for improving the situation in Iraq. Lost in this debate is the importance of recommendation 22: "The president should state that the United States does not seek permanent military bases in Iraq."

At first glance, this recommendation does not appear to carry the weight of other recommendations, most of which deal with sectarian violence and other critical issues. Plus, President Bush has already asserted that the United States does not seek permanent bases within Iraq.

So why should he do so again?

The answer is that many Iraqis are skeptical about the future presence of U.S. forces in their country. And they have good reason for their skepticism. For nearly a century, there has been a close connection in the Middle East between the presence of foreign military bases and the power to exercise national sovereignty.

As many Middle East nations became independent states during the first half of the 20th century, Britain and France retained great influence through economic ties, political agreements and military bases. When Iraqi Prime Minister Rashid Ali refused to heed a British request to suspend Iraqi relations with Italy in 1940, the British government mobilized its forces in Iraq and toppled the country's government. For many Iraqis and others in the region, the ouster of Rashid Ali demonstrated clearly that national sovereignty did not exist as long as foreign troops were stationed permanently within national boundaries.

The presence of American soldiers has similarly aroused suspicion. Throughout the 1990s, Osama bin Laden manipulated Saudi unease by insisting that the presence of U.S. soldiers in Saudi Arabia justified terrorist attacks within the Saudi kingdom. He argued that the troops, who were originally supposed to leave Saudi Arabia shortly after the Gulf War in 1991 but actually stayed for many years, threatened the kingdom's sovereignty. He also argued that U.S. soldiers' proximity to the Saudi cities of Mecca and Medina, Islam's two holiest cities, threatened the security of all Muslims.

In addition, there is the unfortunate example of the U.S. Naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. That base is a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898, when the United States "liberated" Cuba from Spanish rule and turned the island into a virtual U.S. protectorate.

The Platt Amendment, which Congress approved in 1901, gave Washington a veto over the newly independent Cuban government's ability to conduct its own foreign policy. Although the amendment has long since faded into history and a Communist government has ruled Cuba for decades, the United States continues to maintain its base at Guantanamo Bay. That fact alone is enough to give any Iraqi pause.