

From: Hannan, Robert F
Sent: Wednesday, February 01, 2012 12:55 PM
To: Van Buren, Peter M
Cc: Hatcher, Stuart M
Subject: Possible violations of 3 FAM 4170 (Jan. 18-25, 2012)

Peter,

Attached are public statements below made by you from January 18 through January 25.

PA indicates that these public statements relate to matters of official concern and had not been submitted to PA for prior review as required by 3 FAM 4170.

Do you believe they were submitted to PA for review? Would you respond within 2 working days (by COB February 3)? If I do not receive a response in that time frame, I will presume that these statements were not submitted for review and will forward the report to HR.

In addition, you submitted to an interview with the Financial Times for a story published on 23 December 2011.

Was that interview request submitted to PA prior to the interview? If so, would you provide the clearance for that interview by the same February 3 COB deadline? If I do not receive a response in that time frame, I will presume that these statements were not submitted for review and will forward the report to HR.

As you are on leave this week and next, I am also sending this request to the personal email address you provided.

Robert F. Hannan
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[New Interview: Project on Government Oversight](#)

January 25, 2012

With I am sure must be an under-the-table nod to Walt Kelley's seminal comic [Pogo](#) (Kelley coined the phrase "We have met the enemy and he is us"), the Project On Government Oversight ([POGO](#)) is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that has been championing good government reforms since 1981. POGO says its "investigations into corruption, misconduct, and conflicts of interest achieve a more effective, accountable, open, and ethical federal government." Nothing wrong with that.

Given that my book *We Meant Well* does little but chronicle a year's worth of corruption, misconduct and conflicts of interest, plus stupidity, bad management and simple laziness in the reconstruction of Iraq, the nice folks at POGO were interested in learning more. We had a chance to chat, and they turned that into an interesting interview now posted on their [website](#).

POGO: The Commission on Wartime Contracting found that the U.S. has wasted \$31 to \$60 billion in Iraq and Afghanistan on contracting. Do you think we've learned any lessons here?

Peter Van Buren: The mistakes certainly aren't over—we continue to make the same ones in Afghanistan. Two presidents have now told us that our role in Iraq and Afghanistan was to create stability in the Middle East. If that is the definition of success, we've failed with enormous cost, and over an enormous period of time. I don't think any lessons have been learned. We continue to repeat the same errors because we don't know what else to do. For example, when the PRT program in Iraq was shut down—not because it was successful—those very same contractors who failed in Iraq, were picked up in Afghanistan.

[Better 'n Texas: Rule of Law in Iraq Executes 34 Prisoners in One Day](#)

January 25, 2012

One of the goals of the US in Iraq was to institute the "rule of law." Under Saddam, people could be arrested for any reason, convicted without trial and executed on a whim. The US military sacrificed 4479 soldiers' lives to fix this, though the task was largely handed to the State Department to carry out with the assistance of the Department of Justice.

At the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) like the two I lead, implementing the Rule of Law was a standing priority—the World's Largest Embassy in Baghdad (c) even has left the old cheery web pages online from those days, so have a look for [yourself](#). In our area of operations, the law was pretty much either the tribal vengeance of our local Sheikhs, dispensing rudimentary justice like Tony Soprano might, or the heavy-handed actions of the local Iraqi Army commander. The police were scared of both sides, and usually stayed in the back room sleeping off the day's heat, emerging to shake down merchants in the marketplace when business was good, or collect bribes at checkpoints for expedited service.

Apparently such a cynical view of our work enhancing the rule of law in Iraq was not limited to the PRTs outside Baghdad. In fact, in 2008, Ambassador Ryan Crocker's departing US advisor on these matters slammed the "rule of law" effort in Iraq, [telling](#) the cowlicked diplomat that "US officials in the country had mostly ignored legal culture institutions that address underlying requirements for the very success of the rule of law, such as the confidence of citizens, a preventive rather than punitive program against corruption, and the qualifications of the legal profession." The advisor then [quoted](#) the President of the Iraqi Bar:

America's Rule of Law effort in Iraq has focused almost entirely on training police, building prisons, and supporting prosecutions. This is understandable. These areas are important to security but they represent a policeman's and a prosecutor's definition of what Rule of Law means. This definition is limited to law enforcement... [O]ur legal culture is in need of assistance and America's millions of dollars have done little to assist our institutions...If you think that "implanting" the Rule of Law in Iraq is limited to your current Rule of Law efforts, then you are receiving poor advice.

History does not record Ambassador Crocker's reaction, likely because he had been scientifically trained to simply not hear things that disagree with State Department guidance. This physical trait, once rare, is now trained into most

senior diplomats. Crocker was just ahead of his time ignoring the obvious, as was the State Department in general, which continues to “train Iraqi police” to the tune of some \$3-5 billion dollars even as we speak. Instead, the World’s Largest Embassy (c) now has a permanent Rule of Law Coordinator, staffed by [200 personnel](#) in eleven operational units of U.S. Embassy Baghdad. 200 people are working on this issue full time. Here is what they have achieved so far:

The United Nations human rights chief [said](#) on January 24 that she was shocked at reports that 34 people were executed in Iraq in a single day last week. “Even if the most scrupulous fair trial standards were observed, this would be a terrifying number of executions to take place in a single day,” High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay stated in a news release.

“Given the lack of transparency in court proceedings, major concerns about due process and fairness of trials, and the very wide range of offences for which the death penalty can be imposed in Iraq, it is a truly shocking figure,” she added. The death penalty can be imposed in Iraq for around 48 crimes, including a number of non-fatal crimes such as – under certain circumstances – damage to public property.

“Most disturbingly,” said Ms. Pillay, “we do not have a single report of anyone on death row being pardoned, despite the fact there are well documented cases of confessions being extracted under duress.”

...And thus the United States, at first under George Bush and now under Barack Obama, set out to create an Iraq in its own image. Sadly, tragically, it looks like we succeeded, Texas-style.

[Do We Have to Wait for “History” to Judge US Era in Iraq?](#)

January 24, 2012

[Emma Sky](#) is a British academic who had the somewhat odd role of advising General Odierno when he commanded US forces in Iraq. I met the two of them several times in Iraq, and of course the standing joke was that they could not have been more different people. Odierno is a huge man, well over six feet tall, with a shaved head, a gruff manner and as military a bearing and outlook as is possible to have without creating a singularity in space-time. Ms. Sky is perhaps four foot something in height, polite, soft-spoken and very much the academic. It is inconceivable that she ever served in any military. Yet the two worked well together, as chronicled in Tom Ricks’ second great book about the Iraq War, [The Gamble](#).

[Ms. Sky](#), who speaks Arabic and counts many friends, colleagues and contacts in Iraq, recently returned from a pleasure trip to that country, writing an evocative portrait of her travels over on [Foreign Policy.com](#).

The article is good, but one point bothered me: Sky wonders how history will judge the American era in Iraq. I disagree that we need to wait for history. While of course the perspective of 50 or 100 years is always useful, America’s era is over in Iraq, and we can say this about it, unlikely to be changed by the passage of time:

- The US invasion and occupation killed over 100,000 Iraqis, either directly or via the chaos unleashed.
 - The oft-stated US major accomplishment of getting rid of Saddam was all over in 2003. We called it regime “change” but in reality it was just regime “destruction,” only the first half of the change thing.
 - The government we left behind is falling apart like a cardboard box in the rain. The US vision for Iraq– a kind of Middle East Disney World under martial law– fades just as quickly.
 - The US invasion and failure of the reconstruction left Iraq in horrific condition, setting the stage for additional years of suffering. Such suffering can likely fuel additional insurgency and lack of support for any central government. It is a poor legacy.
 - The utter lack of US planning for postwar occupation unleashed sectarian violence and enabled sectarian conflict that is playing out long after the US went home. Whatever comes of that in Iraq’s future is up to the Iraqis, but the US is responsible for letting the genie out of the bottle.
- We left Iraq with blood on our hands. We created or enabled problems we did not solve, and then we left. None of that will change when history judges the American era.

[Choosing Expediency over Morality, Again](#)

January 23, 2012

In [late December](#) I ran a blog post wondering if US foreign policy had been taken over by the cast of Jersey Shore, Snooki, et al, as the US seemed on the verge of granting the current dictator of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, permission to enter the US for “medical treatment.”

Now we know Snooki must be in charge, as the US has apparently once again chosen expediency as the cornerstone of its Middle East policy. Saleh is [enroute to the US](#) as you read this.

Iran once was America’s 51st state in the Middle East. The CIA helped overthrow one government there in 1953 and installed a monarch who bought American weapons, sold America oil and sucked up to the US. That was regime change old-school style.

Then there was an Islamic Revolution that swept through Iran, flawed in its own right, but appealing to a people who had long been kept in line by the Shah’s security apparatus. The Shah was reviled by many of his country

people and, to avoid facing their justice for his actions, fled to the US for “medical care.” (“Medical care” is what dictators say when they need to blow town; for domestic US politicians, the correct phrase is “spend more time with my family.”) Saleh had previously sought medical care in Saudi Arabia, but must have not had insurance because he left to go right back to Yemen. Apparently there are no other doctors available anywhere in the entire world now but in America.

The Shah came to the US, Iran went wild and stormed the US Embassy in Tehran, taking US diplomats hostage. That crisis lasted 444 days, brought down the Carter Administration and messed relations in the Middle East up for pretty much forever. Memories are long in the desert, and people have a tendency to hang around in new roles. What you do today affects a lot of tomorrows, even if memories in the United States are sitcom-short.

“It’s not over for Saleh,” [said](#) Hussein Mansoor, a protester in Sanaa. “We want him to come back to Yemen so that he is tried for his crimes.” On Saturday, lawmakers in Yemen approved a controversial law giving Saleh immunity from prosecution.

Remember the Arab Spring Break? By accepting another non-democratic dictator formerly pals with the US for “medical care,” the US denies the events of 2011. The US has the chance to stand up for its long-term goals of supporting people who wish to throw off a dictator. Instead, it looks like we’ll let him into the US for safe haven, once again choosing expediency over morality. The image of the US among Yemenis will be nothing more than the country that gave shelter to their former dictator. US policy in the Middle East will again be clearly little more than oil and back slapping dictators who feed our counterterrorism fetish.

[4479 Reasons the Iraq War was a Waste](#) January 23, 2012

In December 2011, President Obama paid tribute to the more than one million Americans who served in Iraq, the 4,479 fallen Americans and thousands wounded, as well as Iraqis who gave their lives. “They are the reason that we can stand here today and we owe it to every single one of them, we have a moral obligation to all of them, to build a future worthy of their sacrifice,” [he said](#).

He lied.

As the war drums beat again (Iran this time), we must remember how little politicians actually value our lives. Let us start making a list in relation to what Iraq has become:

4479: General Qassim Sulaimani, head of the Iranian [Qods](#) force for Iraq and scenic Lebanon, saying “Iraq is under the will of Tehran.”

David Hickman, 23, of Greensboro was the [last of the 4479 Americans](#) killed during the Iraq War and Occupation. According to an Associated Press analysis of casualty data, the average age of Americans who died in Iraq was 26. Nearly 1,300 were 22 or younger, but middle-aged people fought and died as well: some 511 were older than 35.

“I used to watch all the [war stories](#) on TV, you know,” said Needham, Hickman’s old coach. “But since this happened to David, I can’t watch that stuff anymore. I just think: That’s how he died.”

4478: 1st Lt. Dustin D. Vincent, 25, of Mesquite, Texas, died November 3, 2011.

[No statement denying](#) the Qods statement from the Iraqi Government.

4477: Sgt. 1st Class David G. Robinson, 28, of Winthrop Harbor, Ill., died October 25.

Iraq is falling back into authoritarianism and headed towards becoming a police state, despite US claims that it has helped establish democracy in the country, [Human Rights Watch](#) said on Sunday.

4476: Capt. Shawn P. T. Charles, 40, of Hickory, N.C., died October 23.

Iraq [cracked down harshly](#) during 2011 on freedom of expression and assembly by intimidating, beating and detaining activists, demonstrators and journalists.

4475: Pfc. Steven F. Shapiro, 29, of Hidden Valley Lake, Calif., died October 21. Iraq remains one of the most [dangerous places in the world](#) for journalists, that women’s rights remain poor and civilians have paid a heavy toll in bomb attacks.

4474: Staff Sgt. James R. Leep Jr., 44, of Richmond, Va., died October 17.

Human Rights Watch discovered a [secret prison](#) run by forces controlled by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki’s office, the same troops who ran Camp Honour, another facility where detainees were tortured.

4473: Spc. Adrian G. Mills, 23, of Newnan, Ga., died September 29.

Prime Minister Maliki’s security services have locked up more than 1,000 members of other political parties over

the past several months, detaining many of them in secret locations with no access to legal counsel and using “[brutal torture](#)” to extract confessions, his chief political rival, Ayad Allawi, has charged.

4472: Sgt. Andy C. Morales, 32, of Longwood, Fla., died September 22.
Iraq remains [consumed by violence](#).

4471: Staff Sgt. Estevan Altamirano, 30, of Edcouch, Texas, died September 18.
Even the State Department thinks “violence and threats against U.S. citizens persist [in Iraq] and [no region should be considered safe](#) from dangerous conditions.”

4470: Cmdr. James K. Crawford, 50, of East Concord, N.Y., died September 7.
Security remains a [primary concern](#) nearly nine years after the U.S. invasion, with bombings a daily occurrence, and most foreign companies hire personal security teams. Bank HSBC spends around \$3,000-\$6,000 a day on security. Ground Works Inc, an engineering, construction and logistics firm, said security for housing and business compounds can run at \$14,000-\$18,000 a month, while a local bodyguard costs \$1,500 a month and a foreign guard \$4,000 per month. Electricity is intermittent and having a generator is a necessity. Businessmen say fuel for generators can cost around \$3,000-\$8,000 a month.

4469: Sgt. Mark A. Cofield, 25, of Colorado Springs, Colo., died July 17.
A scandal unfolding in Denmark over the transfer of Iraqi prisoners by Danish forces to Iraq authorities, even as they knew [they would be tortured](#), threatens to implicate the current Secretary General of NATO.

4468: Spc. Daniel L. Elliott, 21, of Youngsville, N.C., died July 15.
On the day the last US combat troops left the country, Maliki turned against his vice-president Tariq al-Hashimi, accusing him of what he has himself long been suspected of – ordering the bombings and assassinations of his political opponents. Mr Hashimi was not just a leading Sunni Muslim in a Shia-dominated government. He was the linchpin of the political deal stitched together by the US last year, under which the Iraqiya coalition, which won the largest number of votes in the last election, agreed to participate in government. Hashimi fled to the relative safety of Kurdistan, before denouncing the charges as a coup, but he joins a growing list of [internal exiles](#) – all of them Sunni.

4467: pc. Marcos A. Cintron, 32, of Orlando, Fla., died June 16.
At least [30 people](#) connected to the leader of Iraqiya, Ayad Allawi, had been arrested in recent weeks by security forces under Mr Maliki’s personal control.

4466: Sgt. Steven L. Talamantez, 34, of Laredo, Texas, died July 10.
For five years Iraq was the most important item on policy-makers’ agenda. That meant we allowed China to steal a march on the United States. It gained economically, militarily and perhaps even diplomatically as the United States demonstrated it [was not the unquestionable superpower](#) that many believed it was at the start of 2000s.

4465: Spc. Nathan R. Beyers, 24, of Littleton, Colo. died July 7.
Iraq likely played a role in the export of banned US-made internet surveillance equipment to [Syria](#).

4464: Spc. Nicholas W. Newby, 20, of Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, also died July 7.
The State Department continues to [refuse to cooperate](#) in an audit of its multi-billion dollar Iraqi police training program.

4463: Capt. David E. Van Camp, 29, of Wheeling, W.Va. died June 29.
Even though they often are housed on-base at Department of Defense facilities and within secure perimeters for embassies operated by the State Department, many of these [third country national] TCN workers live in sub-human conditions, are subjected to sexual abuse and even prostitution, have wages stolen by subcontractors, and have passports stolen in order to prevent them from leaving,” said Gerry Connolly (D-VA) referring to [widespread human trafficking](#) committed by US government contractors in Iraq.

4462: Capt. Matthew G. Nielson, 27, of Jefferson, Iowa also died June 29.
Percentage of Iraqis who lived in [slum conditions](#) in 2000: 17%; in 2011: 50%

4461: Spc. Robert G. Tenney Jr., 29, Warner Robins, Ga. also died June 29.
Rank of Iraq on [Corruption](#) Index among 182 countries: 175.

To be continued, and repeated...

(All names of the deceased and the dates of their deaths are from [Antiwar.com](#))

Ambassador Chris Hill: It Wasn't Me

January 20, 2012

[Chris Hill](#) was America's Ambassador in Iraq for a year or so, 2009-2010, following his amazing success as chief negotiator to North Korea while they developed their nuclear arsenal. Chris oversaw the US actions in Iraq following the March 2010 elections, directing a robust US response that ended up as "Jesus H. Christ you guys, just form some sort of government so we can call it a democracy and get out of here!"

That government-forming process, which ultimately required the Iranians to step in and broker a deal that led to a declared government only some seven months after the voting ceased, pasted together the lame coalition that Prime Minister Maliki has been furiously tearing back apart since the minute the US military departed Iraq (Note that Maliki was afraid enough of the US military to wait for their departure, but did not give a hoot that the World's Largest Embassy (c) was squatting in town.)

The New York Times [noted](#) that on his departure from Iraq, Chris "rejected criticism that the [election] deadlock reflected his own ineffectiveness or waning American influence." Other media also [laid blame](#) on Chris for failing to represent America's interests well in Iraq.

But that's all just water under the bridge, as Chris asserts in his new [Op-Ed](#).

About the nicest thing one can say about that Op-Ed is that it sounds like it was written by a grad student coming down off a Red Bull sprint (Chris is Dean of the Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver; founder Josef Korbel is the father of Madeleine Albright, former Secretary of State and Chris' old chum. Small world among the 1%.) In case you don't care to read the whole Op-Ed thing, it can be summed up as follows: everything bad happening in Iraq is their own damn fault and America's almost nine year occupation in general, and Chris' tenure as Ambassador in the specific, had nothing to do with it. Now get off my lawn!

But if you insist, we'll poke a bit further.

Chris tries to show off his intimate knowledge of Iraq. He says "*spending time in Baghdad reveals that Sunni and Shia Iraqis have learned to live together, that intermarriage is common, and that the issues that concern people are more secular than sectarian.*" R-i-g-h-t. Many Sunnis living in Sadr City? Any Sunni-Shia tensions in al-Doura? Duh.

But it is OK because Chris knows that "*the reality of Iraq is that most people, especially outside of cosmopolitan Baghdad, see themselves as Sunni or Shia. And that reality is further shaped by the following fact: for decades, Iraq was brutally and not very effectively ruled by the minority Sunnis, whose last leader was Saddam Hussein. The Shia, understandably, don't want them back.*" Now let's check [Wikipedia](#), just who disposed of Saddam and unleashed all those sectarian tensions without a plan on containing them?

Chris just rambles on about how the two sides should just get along, reiterating the basic premise of US-Iraq policy, hoping that somehow things will just work out.

Man up Chris:

–The oft-stated US major accomplishment of getting rid of Saddam was all over in 2003. We called it regime "change" but in reality it was just regime "destruction," only the first half of the change thing.

–The US invasion and failure of the reconstruction left Iraq in horrific condition, setting the stage for additional years of suffering. Such suffering fuels insurgency and lack of support for any central government. It is a poor legacy.

–The utter lack of US planning for postwar occupation unleashed sectarian violence and enabled sectarian conflict that is playing out long after the US went home. The US is responsible for letting the genie out of the bottle.

I'm not the only one who thinks Chris' Op-Ed is a bad joke. Read what [Reider Visser](#) has to say.

Connect the Dots in Iraq: Mercs' 'R Us

January 18, 2012

Oh the places you'll go as a contractor! Here are three items from post-American Era Iraq involving security contractors:

– On January 11 or 12, four American security contractors, working for the US Embassy, were caught and [detained](#) in a Baghdad neighborhood. The four were armed, wearing body armor, and were traveling in a plain

car without diplomatic plates or markings. The group included two men and two women. See their photo on [al-Jazeera](#). Note the goatee, which just screams “merc.”

– On January 11, the World’s Largest Embassy (c) in Baghdad issued a public notice on its [website](#) saying “that the Government of Iraq is strictly enforcing immigration and customs procedures, to include visas and stamps for entry and exit, vehicle registration, and authorizations for weapons, convoys, logistics, and other matters. Rules and procedures may be subject to frequent revisions, and previous permissions may be deemed invalid... The U.S. Embassy is aware of cases where discrepancies in permits or paperwork have resulted in legal action, including detention, by Iraqi police and other entities. Detentions often last 24-96 hours or more. The Embassy’s ability to respond to situations in which U.S. citizens are arrested or otherwise detained throughout Iraq is limited, including in and around Baghdad.”

– Back in late December, three US Triple Canopy “[security contractors](#)” were arrested by the Iraqi Army, held for 18 days without charges and then released after reported efforts by the World’s Largest Embassy (c). The men were detained in a rural area south of Baghdad because the Iraqi military “did not like the ‘mission request authorization’ paperwork that had been issued by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior.”

So, let’s connect the dots:

It sounds like they are having a few bumps in the old road sorting out exactly how diplomacy is going to be practiced with a private army of some 5,500 mercenary security contractors in the mix. It seems those bad boys (and girls!) are not confining themselves to guarding diplomats on social calls to Iraqi ministries either, and are instead covering some ground and attempting some not-so-covert observation work. And getting caught.

Of course everyone is hoping for no [Raymond Davis](#)-like incidents that can happen when armed Americans motor around societies where they are not altogether welcome.

The New York Times, America’s steno pool of record these days, is there to soothe worried patriots. Turns out this is all just Iraqi growing pains, NYT sez. Since being allowed to take over its own immigration and internal security from Daddy America, Iraq is still learnin’ how to do it right. The Times [quoted](#) a senior American military official said that the current disconnect between the Iraqis and the contractors was “primarily an adjustment of our standard operating procedures as we adapt our people and they adapt their security forces to the new situation.”

Others have described it as a power play, with PM Maliki’s son, in some form of private capacity, leading the charge by throwing foreign contractor squatters out of the primo real estate inside the Green Zone.

One possible solution comes from Senator Ben Nelson (R-Absolute Knucklehead), who wants the [Iraqis to pay all security costs](#) for the World’s Largest Embassy (c) in Iraq, thus making all the mercs Iraqi government employees.

In our universe, however, the big money question is... what do these incidents have to say about the future of the World’s Largest Embassy (c) and the 5,500 mercs/security contractors they employ in Iraq? Is the Embassy going to spend its time putting out fires caused by the unusual non-so-diplomatic arrangements in Iraq, or is this just a beginners blip?

Interview: Financial Times

US seeks to keep influence in Iraq

Financial Times (London, England) - Friday, December 23, 2011

Author: Geoff Dyer in Washington and Borzou Daragahi in Cairo

The Obama administration is trying to exert diplomatic influence over the Iraqi government amid fierce political infighting and renewed violence in Baghdad just a week after the last US military forces left the country.

Days after Barack Obama, the US president, celebrated the start of a new era of "normal" relations with **Iraq** as a near-nine year conflict drew to a close, the administration has been forced to use seemingly impromptu high-level visits and telephone diplomacy to staunch a political crisis which some observers fear has the potential to revive civil war.

The political tensions in Baghdad have quickly raised questions about how much sway the US will retain in **Iraq**. The state department will maintain a huge diplomatic presence, including 16,000 people and the biggest embassy in the world, but it faces enormous scepticism, both in **Iraq** and at home, about its new role in the country.

Iraq's political future has been plunged into uncertainty after Nouri al-Maliki, the Shia prime minister, issued an arrest warrant for Tariq al-Hashimi, the Sunni vice-president, deepening the country's sharp political divide. That

sectarian balance was put under more threat on Thursday when apparently co-ordinated bombs exploded across Baghdad, killing at least 60 people.

In the short term, the Obama administration hopes that high-level contacts will help calm tensions. General Ray Odierno, the army chief of staff, met Mr Maliki in Baghdad on Thursday, a day after David Petraeus, the head of the Central Intelligence Agency visited the Iraqi capital. Joe Biden, the vice-president, telephoned several Iraqi leaders over the course of the week.

But it is the state department operation that the administration hopes will allow it to exercise some influence over political affairs. Based in an embassy covering 104 acres on the banks of the Tigris river, the state department will have a budget of \$6bn in **Iraq** next year.

During last week's ceremonies to mark the end of the war, Mr Obama spoke of sustaining an **Iraq** that was "self-governing, inclusive and that has enormous potential". He pointed to future co-operation on trade, energy and educational exchanges.

However, the ability of the vast embassy to exert real influence in Iraqi affairs faces major obstacles, the biggest of which is security. In the weeks before the military left, the embassy issued warnings about the risks of kidnappings in Baghdad - including one which talked of "a severe threat". Of the 16,000 US personnel in **Iraq**, 5,500 will be private security contractors to protect the diplomats. The state department has also leased 90 heavily armoured vehicles from the Pentagon.

On the rare occasions that they venture out of the secure embassy compound, the diplomats wear helmets and protective gear, making it even harder for ordinary Iraqis to tell the difference between the departed US military and the new civilian operation. The US ambassador in **Iraq**, Jim Jeffrey, admitted in a television interview last week that the only US embassy comparable with the fortresslike compound in Baghdad was in Saigon in the 1970s.

Some Iraqi political factions have already voiced alarm about the size of the embassy. Jawad Al-Shahyli, a lawmaker who is close to Moqtada Sadr, the Iranian-backed Shia cleric, said the embassy "constitutes a major threat to the Iraqi political situation," according to the country's official news agency. "We have no doubt about that. The nature of task of the US embassy in Baghdad is an intelligence one."

After being initially sidelined by the Pentagon following the 2003 occupation of **Iraq**, the state department has gradually assumed more roles since 2007, including the distribution and implementation of billions in US development funds to repair schools, improve drinking water and upgrade clinics.

However, many of these activities have also come under attack. Peter Van Buren, a 23-year state department veteran, has written a book, *We Meant Well*, detailing the failed or pointless projects that he managed during a year running a provincial reconstruction team - from a \$2.5m chicken processing plant that stood idle to Arabic translations of *Moby Dick* that were later dumped behind a school.

"Most of the projects were designed to get publicity, not to help Iraqis," Mr Van Buren said. "We did not have the stomach for what it really took to get results."

Some of the same doubts surround the new missions that the state department has taken on. One is running a training programme for the Iraqi police, which has been in operation since 2003 but has been heavily attacked in the US and **Iraq**.

A report by the special inspector-general for **Iraq** construction quoted a senior Iraqi official, Adnan al-Asadi, complaining that most of the funds went on lodging and security. "What tangible benefit will Iraqis see from this police training programme?" he said.

"This is what happens after a bar mitzvah or a Jewish wedding," Gary Ackerman, a House Democrat from New York, joked at a hearing this month, referring to the continued US presence in **Iraq**. "It's called a Jewish goodbye. Everybody keeps saying goodbye but nobody leaves."