From Hard Military Bases to Soft Military Presence: US Military Deployment in Iraq Reassessed

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Abstract: *By the end of 2011, the US had closed all hard military bases in Iraq, but its "soft" military presence remained using private security contractors, military and intelligent officers located in the US embassy and in US consulates, US military training officers and consultants, and deployed special operation forces. Such soft military presence is of great importance and significance. At the national level, it helps Washington to stabilize and control the Iraqi situation; at the regional level, it can secure a strategic balance between Shi'a and Sunni sectors, which is essential for the US to respond to a rising nuclear Iran; at the global level, this soft military presence helps to cut US military expenditure and shift its strategic focus from the Greater*

Middle East to the Asia-Pacific regions. The soft military presence in Iraq reflects Obama's "New Thinking" Doctrine on military deployment in the Middle East, which resembles lily-pads with stronger mobilization and flexibility.

Key Words: *US-Iraq Relations; Gulf Security Studies; Overseas Military Bases; Soft Military Presence; US Middle East Strategy*

After much wrangling, the Iraqi Supreme court passed a resolution on August 15, 2011, which denied diplomatic immunity to the US military forces in the country, and thereafter US troops were denied extra-territoriality in Iraq. Surprised and rather embarrassed, the Obama administration had to face the reality and promptly decided to pull out all armed forces from Iraq and close all military bases there soon thereafter. By the end of December 2011, both the United States and NATO stated that they had no troops stationed, and no military bases to run in Iraq. Thus, the Western military operations that followed the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 came to an end. On December 31, 2011, thousands of Iraqi civilians from all walks of life celebrated peacefully throughout the country the withdrawal of foreign troops. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki declared at the gathering in Baghdad that the day would be the "Iraq Day", symbolizing the formal end to the nine-year-long US military occupation of the country. Therefore, the US fulfilled its "mission" and President Obama abided by the promise to "pull out all armed forces from Iraq" that he had made during his presidential election campaign.

I. Soft Military Presence: Obama Doctrine's "New Thinking" on Military Deployment in Iraq

As Karl Marx put it, land is sufficient for a regional encroaching regime, but waters is indispensable for a world aggressive regime (Marx, K., 1979: 80). As A. T. Mahan put it, "the mysterious power…was not in this or that man, king or statesman, but in that control of the sea…" (Mahan, A.T. 1895:278) Overseas military presence is an important means for big powers to project military dominance, control trade lines and transportation hubs, and interfere in regional and national affairs. Overseas military presence has two forms: hard military bases and soft military presence. The former refers to a military area in public space, overseas territories, colonies, departments, trusted lands, or foreign territories, where a state deploys a certain number of armed forces, engages in military activities, and builds up certain institutions and facilities (China Encyclopedia, 1989: 562). Such hard military bases are represented in recent years by US bases in Qatar (Forward Headquarters of Central Command) and Bahrain (Fifth Fleet), French bases in the United Arab Emirates and Africa, Russian bases in Kirgizstan and Syria, the Japanese naval base in Djibouti, and the Indian bases in Tajikistan. Others illustrate a soft military presence, which is less aggressive and less conspicuous, including *ad hoc* military deployment, technical military stations, overseas arsenals, military supply sites, drone bases, intelligence stations, reconnaissance sites, aerospace tracking facilities and so on. Moreover, broadcast relay stations, communication facilities, aerospace and aviation launchers, and ground receiving stations are sometimes regarded as soft military bases too (Harkavy, R. E., 1982: 27). According to statistics, in 2010, soft military presence represented 90% of all US military forces abroad, while big and medium-sized military bases made up only 6% of the total (See table 1). The US military deployment in the Middle East is a case in point.

Currently Washington boasts hard military bases in Turkey, Djibouti, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, among others, and soft military presence in Algeria,[①] Israel, Iraq and Yemen. The soft military presence has more flexibility, stronger mobility, lower cost, and what is more, less offensive to the host nations.

Table 1：US Military Deployment Abroad（in 2010）

	Large Bases	Medium-sized Bases	Soft Military Presence	Others	Total
Army Bases	4	7	238	6	255
Naval bases	6	2	97	9	113
Air Bases	8	6	201	6	221
Marine Bases	3	1	13	5	22
Total	20	16	549	26	611

Source: Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy under Secretary of Defense, *Base Structure Report, Fiscal Year 2010 Baseline*, 2011, p. 25.

Similar to that of former US President George W. Bush, Jr., the Obama administration's priority in the Middle East has remained unchanged; its objective is to secure US regional leadership in the region. However, the means that Obama use to this end is much different. During the Bush presidency, Washington attached great importance to building and expanding military bases in the Middle East, a practice that was harshly criticized by the Islamic governments and people, particularly Islamic radicals and extremist groups. From 2001 to 2008, apart from Germany, Japan and South Korea, US military

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[①] Although Algerian authorities have consistently denied any US presence in the country, there is evidence that the US enjoys a soft presence in the Algerian desert near the southernmost city of Tamanrasset (Kaplan, R. D. 2007: 166).

forces overseas concentrated mainly in the Middle East and Islamic countries, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, and Djibouti, with US armed forces in Iraq topping others (see table 2) in the early 21st century.

The question as to whether the US should continue to run military bases in Iraq in the future caused heated debate in Washington. As early as June 2006, a policy report by the Pentagon suggested that the US should continue to operate four big military bases in Iraq, mostly air bases, including Tallil in the South, Al-Asad in the West, Balad in Central Iraq, and Tal Afar in the North. Among the Four, Balad air base was the largest; it boasted 20,000-25,000 American troops at the peak. The base was protected by a 25-kilometer-long security zone. It was the gateway to Baghdad (Thaler, D. E., 2008: 115-116). In 2008, another report by RAND, a renowned US Army think-tank, put forth a similar suggestion. The authors of the report argued that after the US troops were demobilized in Iraq, Washington should maintain one or two permanent military bases. For instance, US air bases in Balad and Al-Asad may be frequently used to deploy US Predator drones. Meanwhile, the report said, the bases could contribute to such military operations as air support, military rescue, assistance, and tactical airlifting. The two military bases would also be used to coordinate with the larger and harder US Central Command military bases in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, such as intelligence, pre-warning, reconnaissance, aerial refueling, attacking Gulf high value targets, and military deterrence (Thaler, D. E., 2008: 116).

Table 2: US Military Forces in Iraq（By May 5，2005）

Branch of Service	Troop Numbers	National Guard	Troop Numbers	Branch of Service	Troop Numbers

Army Force	78,490	Army National Guard	29140	Army Reserve	9773
Navy Force	2299	Air National Guard	500	Navy Reserve	430
Air Force	7149			Air Force Reserve	343
Marine Corps	20103			Marine Corps Reserve	2376
Total	108,964	Total	29640	Total	12922

Source: Linwood B. Carter, "Iraq: Summary of US Forces," *CRS Report for Congress*, May 23, 2005, pp. 1-2.

Since Obama took office, the US government has attached greater importance to small-scale military bases with stronger mobility and flexibility. This lily pad-like soft military presence is less visible and less offensive to the host governments and local residents, and therefore, can effectively reduce the chance of "politicization" of overseas military bases in the Islamic countries.

On January 5, 2012, the Pentagon announced its latest national defense report titled, "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense". It declared that, "[a]s we end today's wars and reshape our Armed Forces, we will ensure that our military is agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies, In particular, we will continue to invest in the capabilities critical to future success, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; counterterrorism; countering weapons of mass destruction; operating in anti-access environments; and prevailing in all domains, including cyber (US Department of Defense, 2012: 3)." That was a reflection of

the Obama Doctrine on overseas military deployment.

Influenced by the Obama "New Thinking" Doctrine on military deployment, Washington abandoned as early as 2010 the previous scheme of "maintaining several permanent military bases in Iraq", and determined to close all military bases there, and by December 31, 2011, a goal the US reached. However, a careful study reveals a different version: the Pentagon has not yet pulled out all the military personnel, but instead, has maintained a soft military presence in Iraq focused on a number of areas.

First, US soft military presence was in the form of private security contractors. On the one hand, Washington had withdrawn all troops from Iraq; on the other hand, the US still employed a number of private security contractors, some of whom actually are US troops without military uniforms. The US government hired private security contractors to maintain Iraqi security and escort American nationals in the country. Since US military bases were no longer visible, the soft military presence had minimized antipathy from Iraqi society. From August 31, 2010 to 2012, the US Department of State had employed over 6,000 private security contractors, a large increase from 2,700 in 2009. For instance, founded by former Navy SEAL Erik Prince, the original "Blackwater" security contractor cultivated a special-operations mystique. "Blackwater" (i.e., "Xe" now renamed the "Academi") hired a great number of retired American soldiers and other special agents.[1] They were so well-experienced in operations and in tactics that their combat capability and quality even exceeded that of a regular army (Ma, X., 2010: 4). In October 2011, Ted Wright,

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[1] In December 2011, Virginia-based "Xe" planned to unveil a new name—"Academi"—and new logo. In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, Ted Wright, President and CEO, said the name change aimed at signalling a strategy shift by one of the US government's biggest providers of training and security services. See: Nathan Hodge, "Company Once Known as Blackwater Ditches Xe for Yet Another New Name," *the Wall Street Journal*, December 12, 2011.

CEO of "Blackwater", told *the Wall Street Journal* correspondent that the company had restored and would further expand its business in Iraq (Denselow, J., 2011). By January 29, 2012, the US private security contractors had numbered 5,000 in Iraq, which mainly performed such tasks as military preparation , security operations, peacekeeping and security checks (Schmitt, E, and Schmitt, M., 2012).

Second, the US soft military presence was in the form of security and intelligence officers at the US embassy and consulates. Now that the new Iraqi government denied US military forces' diplomatic immunity and extra-territoriality, the Pentagon had to keep a certain number of security and intelligence officers in the US embassy and consulates in Iraq. Statistics show that the American embassy in Baghdad was the largest and the most expensive around the world; it served as a "green zone" and "bridgehead" for US power projection. That embassy, as large as the Vatican in Rome, covered an area of 104 acres, and was equipped with its own water supply, electricity facilities and drainage systems, making it virtually "a state within a state" (Denselow, J., 2011: October 25). As of 2012, the US Embassy in Baghdad boasted 17,000 staff and officers, including diplomats, military attachés, as well as security and intelligence officers, most of whom endowed with diplomatic immunity. According to *the Washington Post*, after the US military occupation of Iraq, Washington had dispatched about 300 intelligence officers and 500 intelligence staff, making Iraq a region with the largest number of intelligence personnel since the end of the Cold War, comparable to Sai Kung, South Viet Nam in the late 1960s (Hoffman, B., 2004: 10). After the US withdrew its forces from Iraq in late 2011, there were still about 16,000 diplomats, security and intelligence officers in the embassy in Baghdad with dynamic soft military presence inside. In addition, the three consulates in Basra, Kirkuk, and Mosul, staffed with one thousand persons in each of one, were staffed with a certain number of security and intelligence officers (Denselow, J., 2011).

Third, US soft military presence was in the form of military

training officers and consultants. After conquering Iraq, the US dispatched military officers and consultants to help the Iraqi transitional government to train combatants and the police. In 2008, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee argued that, to lessen antipathy from the local Iraqi people, Washington should rely on military training programs and encourage US combatants and intelligence officers to infiltrate Iraq, so that US presence can be less conspicuous (Bowman, B. L., 2008: 83-84). Raymond Odierno, a US top military official in Iraq, admitted that after pulling out its forces, part of those US forces would remain in the Iraqi local security checkpoints. Their main task consisted of training, supervising, providing medical-care, assisting in air control, and giving helicopter support. The Office of Security Cooperation (OSC), for instance, located in the US embassy in Baghdad, made up of several dozen American officers, aimed at training Iraqi special forces. By cooperating fully with the Iraqi armed forces, these officers were both trainers and consultants. As Martin E. Dempsey, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff put it, although limited in number, the team of trainers and consultants would help the Iraqi transitional government to improve their combat skills and carry out training programs, so that the Iraqi government would be ready for procurement of US arms in the future. US training programs concentrated on about ten Iraqi military bases; they not only trained Iraqi troops and police, but they also engaged in counterterrorist campaigns with their Iraqi counterparts (Pincus, W., 2011).

Due to the presence of American military officers and consultants, the US became the largest supplier of arms to Iraq, a position previously occupied by the Soviet Union/Russia and France. By 2011, the US and Iraq had signed about 400 military cooperation agreements

with a total value of US$10 billion, including 18 F-16s with a value of over US$2 billion, as well as other US$6 billion worth of weapons and military facilities. In that year, Washington and Bagdad embarked on another negotiation of arms deal with a value of US$900 million. According to the new agreements, the US would send 160 more civilians and military attachés to participate in various Iraqi training programs, and there were 750 more American civilians who would stay permanently in Iraq to supervise the US military aid program in Iraq. After evacuating Iraq in December 2012, Washington left about US$400 million worth of military facilities, and in 2012 US was to offer Iraq about US$6 billion of additional aid programs, so these programs could not transact smoothly without the coordination from the US military officers and consultants (Steele, D., 2012: 53). To improve its training in Iraq, the US set up about 10 offices in Iraq and sent about 3,500 American staff in total for various programs. For instance, the US 402nd Army Field Support Brigade (AFSB) assumed the maintenance of Iraqi troops; this was obviously part of the military presence. Undoubtedly, the US training officers and consultants will maintain their presence in Iraq, thus playing an important role in Iraqi security in the future (Steele, D., 2012: 54-55).

Fourth, US soft military presence was also in the form of special air forces. Despite the fact that the US had demobilized its armed forces in Iraq, the Baghdad air defense force was still under US control through a US special force. US top officials at the Pentagon reiterated time and again that the US was committed to Iraqi security, and would reserve the right to combat al-Qaeda cells in Iraq and jihadists, including the use of targeted killings of Islamic extremists and terrorists with drones. Apart from the larger drones deployed in Iraq by the US Department of Defense and the CIA, such as RQ-1

"Predator" and MQ-9 "Reaper" with 55-feet wing length, the US Department of State itself also deployed over 20 small drones with wing length of 18 inches. Although they were not lethal, they were extensively used for intelligence collection, communication, and for guaranteeing the physical security of diplomats (Schmitt, E., 2012).

II.   Implications of US Soft Military Presence in Iraq

In 2012, US military and security personnel numbered around 15,000 to 30,000, and such soft military presence would indubitably exert a far-reaching influence on US strategy in Iraq, in the Persian Gulf and around the world.

First, at the state level, the US soft military presence in Iraq would help the Obama administration to further stabilize and dominate Iraq. In the past decade, Washington has taken great pains to shape Iraq as a "model" for other failed and failing states, to demonstrate that "Islam and democracy are compatible". Therefore, with Iraq as an example, Washington highlighted that Western democracy and values were universal, and the so-called "Islamic democratic exceptionalism" is untenable.

Since it is located at the heart of the Middle East, a democratic and Western-style Iraq would have a strong symbolic significance and would produce a "spill over effect", for a successful Iraqi transition to democracy would set a model for other Arab transitional countries, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen. Therefore, a stable, democratic and prosperous Iraq serves Washington interests, and US soft military presence would serve as guarantee. On November 26, 2011, Iraqi President Talabani pointed out that US presence in Iraq after 2011 was a necessity and would be of great significance because

Iraqi forces were still weak, ill-experienced, and poorly equipped, and particularly its navy and air forces were too feeble to defend itself (Talabani: US Presence in Iraq beyond 2011 is a Necessity, 2012). A continuous US military presence, in the form of military and police trainers, consultants, and private security contractors would effectively prevent Iraq from becoming the target of terrorist attacks and sectarian conflicts, save a democratic constituency of the new Iraq, and consolidate US dominance of Iraq.

As mentioned before, military presence was an essential means for the US to stabilize and control Iraq, but hard military bases would not only have combat functions, but would also create a political by-product, that is, angering the local residents. Since 2003, the Iraqi people commonly regarded US military occupation and military bases as the extension of modern Western colonial rule, claiming that US soldiers were invaders, not liberators, and Iraqi sovereignty and dignity had been violated. Since Washington's military occupation started a decade ago, it was estimated that over 1.5 million Iraqi people had died from sanctions, wars, conflicts, terrorist attacks and hunger, thus causing a serious humanitarian disaster that aroused hatred. That was the root of anti-Americanism and terrorism in the country (Kohut, A. 2010; Laconte, J. 2009; Sponeck, H, 2006: 20; PEW Survey 2007). Since the establishment of a transitional government in Iraq, the call for complete withdrawal of US troops and for closing all hard military bases was increasingly loud in the Iraqi parliament and among the masses. In addition to Sunni Iraqis, large segments of the Iraqi Shi'a and Iraqi Kurd also requested that the US close all military bases. In 2008, the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland carried out a survey, which showed that nearly 70% of Iraqi people hoped that the US should pull out its

armed forces immediately (Cooley, A., 2008: 269). In the same year, Bradley L. Bowman, an officer in the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee argued in an article in *the Washington Post* that US military bases in Iraq had induced Islamic radicals and terrorists to target the US Clearly, US military bases in Iraq were not only unnecessary, but were also perceived to be offensive and hostile to the Iraqi people. Consequently, he pointed out that the US should close all its military bases in Iraq; he also argued that the US Central Command's military deployment in the GCC countries was powerful enough to respond to any Iranian threat (Bowman, B. L., 2008: 79). As a result, US soft military presence in Iraq since 2011 would not only guarantee US control over Iraqi security affairs, but also lower Iraqi people's dissatisfaction and antipathy.

Figure 1: US Troop Levels in Iraq（March 2003 to December 2011）
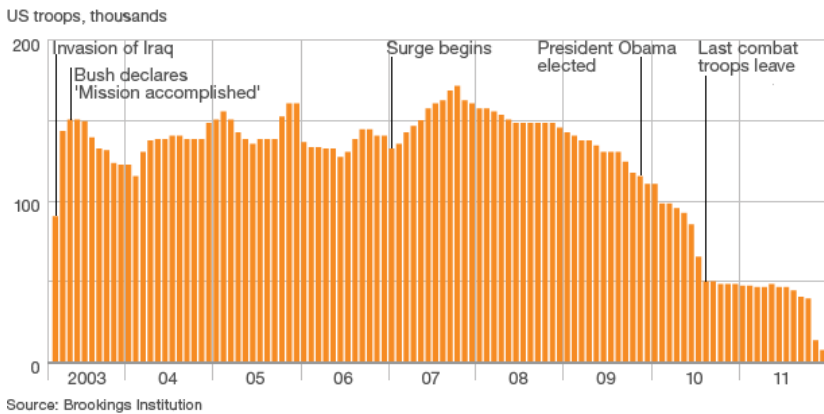
Source: "Iraq War in Figures",
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11107739.

Second, at the regional level, US soft military presence in Iraq helps to curb alleged Iranian aggression, and maintain a strategic

balance between Shi'a and Sunni sectors in the Persian Gulf. In the past six decades, overseas military bases were one of the important means for the United States to maintain its status of an "offshore balancer". For example, since the end of World War II, the US-led axis coalition defeated Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan After defeating these powers, Washington established permanent hard military bases in the three countries to contain and establish a counterbalance to the communist bloc. During the Korean War in the early 1950s, the US suffered a quarter million casualties. Afterwards, it stationed troops in South Korea, resulting in the establishment of a strategic balance in the Korean Peninsula When the Kosovo War ended in 1999, the US crushed Serbia and maintained a balance with Russia in the Balkans With the Afghan and the Iraq wars in 2001 and 2003, respectively, the US succeeded in building military bases in the two Islamic countries, which serve as a dissuasion force against Iran.

Therefore, after withdrawing its forces from Iraq, the Pentagon's key concern was that Iran might take advantage and "Finlandize" (i.e. "neutralize") Iraq and Saudi Arabia, compelling the two regional powers to seek a compromise with Iran. The consequence of such scenario would be an inequity of power between Sunnis and Shi'as in the Persian Gulf. The Obama administration firmly believed that Iranians would attempt to fill the power vacuum created by the US military withdrawal, and infiltrate further into Iraqi Shi'a heartland. If that happened, the US government reckoned, the Iran-led "Shi'a Crescent", consisting of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon would materialize, a development unacceptable for Washington For many years, Tehran was quite complacent with the chaotic Iraqi situation since that provided a barrier against US military intervention in Iran (Djerejian, E. P., & Wisner, F. G., 2003: 13). In November 2011,

the United States and its European allies declared that they would implement a new round of sanctions against Iranian oil companies and financial institutions, a decision Tehran harshly decried. Iranians threatened that, if another round of sanctions is imposed, Iran might close the Strait of Hormuz, and that oil price would rocket by 50% if that happened. In the recent report "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense", delivered by the US Department of Defense in January 2012, the Pentagon made it clear that, to contain Iran and stop its would-be destructive activities, the US would cooperate with the GCC countries and other allies to maintain military presence in the Persian Gulf (US Department of Defense, 2012: 2). By the end of 2012, almost all Iranian neighbors, such as Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, and Pakistan have harbored US troops in either US hard military bases or through soft military presence. According to recent CENTCOM figures communicated to Al Jazeera on April 30, 2012, the number of US troops in close proximity to Iran nears 125,000 (Piven, B., 2012). US aircraft carriers, like floating bases, in the Persian Gulf and in the Arabian Sea, are part of the chains of military bases.[1] According to CENTCOM, around 15,000-20,000 soldiers are afloat on naval vessels in the Near East area. US soft military presence in Iraq is one of the links, connecting those in the GCC countries and in Turkey, playing an essential role for Washington to keep its predominance in the Persian Gulf.

Finally, at the global level, US soft military presence in Iraq is conducive to US strategic shift from the Greater Middle East to the

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[1] On floating bases in the Persian Gulf, see, Shanker, T., "Floating Base Gives US New Footing in the Persian Gulf, " *New York Times*, July 11, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/12/world/middleeast/the-navy-ship-ponce-reflects-the-new-united-states-way-of-war.html.

Asia-Pacific regions. On the one hand, the soft military presence in Iraq could help to cut the US defense budget and lift the US fiscal deficit, so that the Pentagon could pour more resources into the Asia-Pacific regions. According to statistics, by 2011, the US federal debt had exceeded US$14 trillion, which virtually equals the US GDP of the same year, while the US debt per capita reached a historical record of US$45,000. In 2010 alone, the US federal government paid US$414 billion in interest of the federal debt (Khan, A., 2011: 19). With the slowdown of the US economy, on December 31, 2011, President Obama ratified an act deciding that the 2012 US National Defense Budget would be amount to US$662 billion, a drop of US$63 billion (Nakamura, D., 2012). In January 2012, the Pentagon declared that in 2013, the US defense budget would drop to US$613.4 billion. President Obama also demanded that in the next decade, the US defense budget should be cut by US$450 billions in total, of which US$78 billion would be cut from 2012-2016 (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2011: 2). To achieve that goal, the US must cut its military expenditure overseas, particularly in Iraq. In the past decade, the US spent over US$800 billion on the Iraq War and combating insurgents in the post-war Iraq. It took Washington over one billion dollars annually to run hard military bases in Iraq alone, which became an unbearable burden for Washington, especially if one adds the other military expenditures. Compared with the previous hard military bases in Iraq, the soft military presence is cheaper and more flexible, enabling defense budget cuts. As the report "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense" pointed out, although the US would cut the defense budget, enforcing US overseas military presence requires creative ways (US Department of Defense, 2012: 6). The soft military presence is one of those "creative methods".

Furthermore, US soft military presence in Iraq alleviated US lack of armed forces in the global base deployment. President Obama underscored time and again that the decade-long US anti-terror war had deviated from the direction and that the US must refocus on the Asia-Pacific regions, for the area was rising in global influence, and the US has a big stake countering that influence. On November 17, 2011, President Obama delivered a speech to the Australian parliament, whereby he reiterated the two states' six-decade long strategic alliance. In his speech, Obama declared that the US would increase its military maneuvers in Australia, and US naval forces would be stationed in Australia. With overseas military bases in Australia as platforms, the US would strengthen its military preparations with its Australian ally and at the same time train Australian troops. Obama is convinced that a powerful US military presence in the Asia-Pacific regions would enforce the US rapid response and deployment, and guarantee "regional peace and security". In 2012, the US planned to dispatch 250 marines in Darwin City, north of Australia the total US force in the military base would reach 2,500 in the years to come. On January 5, 2012, President Obama further illustrated the US "blueprint" for future military strategy, which are three-fold . First, the US will reduce its military presence in Europe, Africa and Latin America, while containing anti-US forces in the Middle East, particularly Iran. The US will also increase its military presence in the Asia-Pacific regions. Second, the US Army troops would be reduced from 570,000 to 490,000, while increasing the Navy and Air forces' power projection capabilities. Third, the US will reduce its large and permanent military bases and increase smaller and mobilized military presence abroad (Bumille, E., & Shanker, T., 2012). Since the Obama administration regarded the blossoming

Asia-Pacific regions as key to its military deployment, and since it was determined to consolidate US military bases in Australia, Guam, Japan, Okinawa, South Korea, and South East Asia, the US withdrawal of active troops and deployment instead of soft military presence in Iraq would certainly help Washington to eye on East Asia.

III. Conclusion

Both the Obama and Bush administrations have similarities and differences on the military deployment in Iraq. In the past decade, the US deployed a considerable number of troops, resources and diplomatic energy in Iraq to set a "democratic model" for other failed and failing Islamic states. To achieve that goal, the US paid a heavy price—4,485 soldiers and officers died, 72,271 were injured, and 2,097 public servants lost their lives. The enduring conflicts and chaos cost Washington a direct loss of US$805 billion (Fischer, H., 2010: 1). Both Bush and Obama highlighted the importance of US predominance and sole leadership in Iraq and Iraqi security affairs; both underscored the three-fold interests of the US in the Middle East, i. e., first, to ensure the security of Israel, Turkey, Bahrain, Qatar, and Iraq and other US allies; second, to keep a strategic balance between Shi'a and Sunni sectors, between Persians and Arabs, and between Palestinians and Israelis; and, third, to enhance Middle East democratization and safeguard US energy security. Since Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq are the three countries hold the richest oil reserves, the US soft military presence in Iraq, together with its hard bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE etc., would form an "Arabian Gulf Shield", and consolidate the US hegemonic position in the volatile Persian Gulf. Obama and Bush share the same goal in this

respect.

Nevertheless, the two Presidents have different views on the means to achieve the ends. Bush emphasized US hard power and pursued unilateralism, preemption and deployment of hard military bases to defeat "Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic fascism". Hard military bases, President Bush thought, would create a "shock and awe" effect to anti-US forces in the Middle East. In his logic of neo-conservatism, the Middle East is the only "exception" to the Western-dominated international system, so it remains the focus of US global strategy and regional governance. As a result, Bush regarded US hard military bases in the Greater Middle East as the "bridgehead" to contain Islamic radicals, project US military force, interfere in Middle East affairs, and foster Middle East good governance.

However, since assuming power, President Obama has readjusted the US military strategy. With a banner of "implementing US smart power", the Obama Doctrine was less aggressive, relying more on allies and multilateralism, and instead advocated the projection of a US global force in an intangible, flexible, and mobilized way. US soft military presence in Iraq, therefore, was smaller but more effective and useful in recent years.

Apart from Iraq, Obama attempted to build a soft military presence in other parts of the world, as well. For instance, in January 2012, the US declared that it would establish soft military presence, i.e. drone bases, in Ethiopia and in the Republic of Seychelles (Schmitt, E., & Schmidt, M., 2012). On January 25, 2012, Washington admitted that it had no interest in building military bases in the Philippines, but that it was interested in cooperation in joint military exercises, anti-terrorism, and combating piracy with its Pilipino

counterpart. These are all the products of Obama's Doctrine of "light footprint" strategy (Whitlock, C., 2012), making overseas military presence smaller like "lily-pads".

All in all, on can predict that in the years to come, US smaller, cheaper, more flexible, and less visible soft military presence abroad, like that in Iraq, would play an increasingly important role in US military strategy on the globe.

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