U.S.’s Exit from the Military Mission of Iraq

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | International relations*

Why in News?

Recently, the United States officially concluded its 23-year military footprint in federal Iraq, completing the scheduled transition under Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR).

Evolution of the U.S. Military Footprint in Iraq

Phase I	**Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-2011)**	Initiated in March 2003 to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime based on allegations of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Reached a peak presence of over *170,000* troops before a full combat withdrawal were executed under the Obama administration in December 2011.
Phase II	**Re-intervention & Operation Inherent Resolve (2014-2021)**	U.S. forces returned in 2014 at the invitation of the Iraqi government to lead an international coalition against the territorial expansion of the **Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS/Daesh)**, which had seized nearly one-third of Iraqi territory.
Phase III	**Transition to Advisory Role (2021-2024)**	In December 2021, the U.S. formally concluded its active combat mission, shifting remaining personnel (~2,500 troops) strictly to training, intelligence-sharing, and advisory functions.
Phase IV	**Complete Phased Drawdown (2024-2026)**	Following bilateral security talks under the U.S.-Iraq Higher Military Commission, a phased timetable was established to dismantle coalition military structures, transferring major installations (such as Al-Asad Airbase) directly to Iraqi Joint Operations Command control. The Iraqi government declared the transition a major milestone for national sovereignty, establishing the day as a national celebration ("Day of Sovereignty").

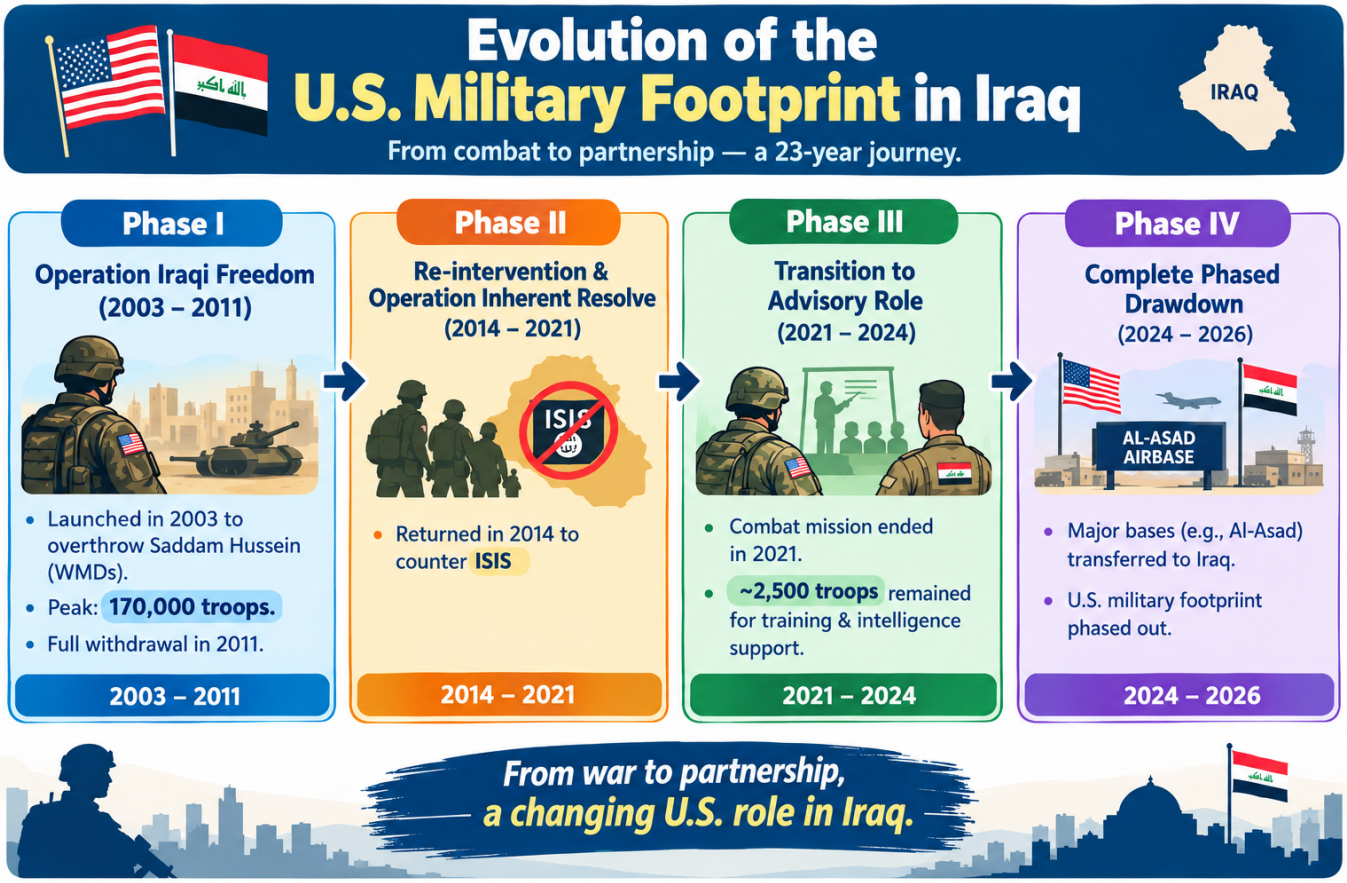
Geopolitical Implications

- Replaces the multi-nation Coalition Task Force with a standardized bilateral defense relationship between Washington and Baghdad, shifting focus toward economic, trade, and diplomatic cooperation.
- While the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have significantly upgraded intelligence and operational readiness, concerns persist regarding residual ISIS sleeper cells in rural desert pockets.
- Also, the ISF's reliance on external air support and advanced surveillance systems.
- Leaves a complex domestic security landscape involving powerful political factions and militia groups under the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), amidst ongoing regional frictions across

the Middle East.

Significance for Global Security

- **End of Forever Wars Era -** Marks the symbolic conclusion of major post-9/11 U.S. military interventions in the Greater Middle East (following the 2021 Afghanistan withdrawal).
- **Strategic Pivot-** Allows the U.S. national security apparatus to reallocate defense assets toward the Indo-Pacific region and global power competition.
- **Impact on India's West Asia Interests-** A stable, sovereign Iraq is critical for India's energy security (Iraq remains one of India's top crude oil suppliers) and the safety of the Indian diaspora across the Persian Gulf region.



Reference

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