



MEI MEDIA WATCH

(A Survey of Editorials)

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US Combat Pullout from Iraq, August 2010

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[By the end of August 2010, the US pullout bulk of its combatant troops from Iraq and the remaining 50,000 troops would advise and assist the Iraqi security forces to maintain security in the country. This was in tune with the pledge of President Barak Obama and marks a significant stage in the US policy since its invasion of Iraq in 2003. Commentaries of various international media on this development are reproduced here. **Editor, MEI Media Watch.**]

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TheNational

Abu Dhabi, Editorial, 3 August 2010, Tuesday

1. Iraq has no time to squabble as it moves ahead

Any Iraqis still holding their breath in the hope that the US will slow down its withdrawal plans should exhale now – Barack Obama will not be swayed. Standing before an assembled group of disabled veterans from America's wars, the US president had a pointed message for the Iraqis: 'Make no mistake; our commitment in Iraq is changing – from a military effort led by our troops to a civilian effort led by our diplomats.'

By the end of August (2010), the US will have only 50,000 troops left in Iraq. That is no middling number, but if the US stance is to be believed – and there is no reason to doubt it – Iraq

will be expected to fully take control of its own future within the month. Iraqis can and should be able to do this, but judging by the dire state of their politics, it is doubtful that the transition will be smooth.

It has been five months since Iraqis went to the polls to elect a new government – and they still don't have one. The Iraqi people may have had their say on who will govern, but the politicians insist on having theirs. That is the problem. Instead of bowing to popular will, the major political blocs have been wrangling with one another for the greatest say in the country's future.

Time, however, is running out. It is probably already too late for an agreement to be reached before the deadline of 31 August (2010). Ramadan is fast approaching, and legislators will be reticent to carry on heated negotiations throughout the Holy Month.

The major Shiite religious bloc, the Iraqi National Alliance, stated on Sunday (1 August) that they will withdraw from negotiations with the coalition of the incumbent Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki, until that group names a different candidate for the premiership. For Mr al Maliki's part, he has said that he will step down if the other groups can come up with a consensus candidate. No doubt he hopes that the divisions between his rivals will preclude this from happening.

Iraqis are growing weary of the squabbling. After seven years of conflict and billions of dollars spent, the Iraqis still do not even have regular access to electricity. Their anger at the mismanagement, especially in the searing summer heat, has spilled over into the streets.

There are still reasons for optimism that Iraq will resolve its problems. The desire of the people for peace and stability is one such reason. But if Iraq still hopes that the outside world will save it from itself, it is sorely mistaken. The clock is ticking.

Source:

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100804/OPINION/708039940/1033/editorials?template=opinion>



Beirut, Editorial, 3 August 2010, Tuesday

2. What next after a US withdrawal?

Barack Obama on Monday (2 August) told a group of US military veterans that the country would adhere to the timetable for withdrawing from Iraq, as he promised shortly after taking office. While we welcome the step of an American president keeping his word in the Middle East, this particular positive move also begs a few vitally important questions about the future US policy in Iraq and in the region.

As far as Iraq goes, we are still waiting for an answer about what the drawdown will mean for US responsibilities to the country. We were not fans of Saddam Hussein, but since his fall the US has directly caused the suffering of millions of Iraqis, and it still has a responsibility to clean up the mayhem spawned by its adventure.

To be sure, the American military needs to leave Iraq; the Iraqi people and leaders have made this desire clear for years. But what is the US doing, for example, to foster the creation of an Iraqi government? In case the Americans have forgotten, Iraq held general elections in March (2010), and yet no cabinet has arisen.

In addition, we recently catalogued in this space a litany of US failures in nation-building; we still believe the US owes Iraq a great deal in repairing and creating infrastructure and the institutions necessary for a functioning state.

Obama's effort to keep his promise is commendable, however it does not mark a reconstruction of US policy; leaving from a still poorly functioning Iraq will do little to change perceptions in the region of US policy.

We are not asking the US to reconsider its military withdrawal; we are asking Obama to assert the unmatched political and economic power of the US in order to help stabilize Iraq – and the region.

We would be remiss if we did not also acknowledge another encouraging sign in US policy on the Middle East: the Obama administration has clearly recognized and admitted the linkage between the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and the region's other crises. For three decades the Israelis and their skilled allies in the US have somehow managed to hoodwink US diplomacy into ignoring the close connection between the stalled peace process and the continued instability in Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere.

Confirming the promised drawdown in Iraq and seeing linkage as a policy basis are undoubtedly steps in the right direction, but – considering the US history of duplicity, fecklessness and failure in a Middle East unceasingly beset by turmoil – these steps appear as the first paces in a journey of many miles and many years.

Take the troops home – and put the peace negotiators, policy-makers and builders to work.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=117761



Muscat, Editorial, 4 August 2010, Wednesday

3. Future of Iraq

Iraq is groping in the dark for a political solution. Five months after parliamentary elections, the elected representatives have not been able to make any headway or break the deadlock, continuing the current crisis nonchalantly. The stumbling block for forming a government is Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki whose desire to cling to power for another term, unacceptable to his alliance partners, is torpedoing every effort. What was abominable was the four main alliances that emerged victorious after the 7 March (2010) poll- Maliki's State of Law; former premier Iyad Allawi's Iraqia; Iraqi National Alliance (INA) of which cleric Moqtada Al Sadr's party is the largest faction; and Kurdistania comprising the two blocs of the autonomous region- had given a freer rein to their selfish motives than national interests in cobbling a coalition. At least it had been so until June when political leaders raised the prospects of forming a government with the merger of State of Law and INA under the National Alliance banner. But Iraqis' hopes were dashed as quickly as the Alliance formation because Maliki once again turned out to be the villain of the piece insisting on his nomination as prime minister. Since the National Alliance is the biggest political block in parliament at the moment, the chances of other groups forming a majority government are bleak unless there is a realignment of political forces which the Alliance partners Sadrists have ruled out.

Amidst the political impasse chaos is reigning supreme: An escalation in civilian violence, poor law and order, deteriorating civic services and absence of governance. The plight of Iraqis compels us to ask whether they deserve this kind of life seven years after the US-led invasion destroyed whatever wealth they had had. A civilian democratic government is supposed to usher in an age of peace and prosperity. At least that was the hope with which a majority of Iraqis had wholeheartedly welcomed the US-led forces when they marched into Baghdad in 2003. Instead, Iraqis are going through hell, thanks to power-hungry political leaders with greedy ambitions who have been failing their people showing least respect for their wellbeing. The international community has been eagerly waiting to see a return to civilian democratic rule in the strife-torn country. But it appears that the Iraqi leaders are not able to nurture democracy and nourish it even after suffering years of autocratic rule.

The first democratic experiment began in 2006 when a people's elected government was put in place when the US was still guarding the country with thousands of troops. But President Barack Obama's reaffirmation on Monday that American combat troops would leave Iraq by this month-end [August] as promised throws a challenge to Baghdad. While the US is retaining some advisers and trainers for Iraqi security forces, other Americans will pull out leaving the country in the hands of the civilian administration. Unless a coalition cabinet is formed before August 31 [2010] to take charge of the country, Iraq runs into deeper trouble. The political vacuum,

exacerbated by the departure of American forces, will create a fertile ground for insurgency, sectarian strife and turmoil.

Source:

http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1689&heading=EDITORIAL

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 9 August 2010, Monday

4. Iraq, the region's prized bull

Years after Saddam Hussein's long and bloody reign over Iraq and former US President George W. Bush's brutal invasion of the country, a general election earlier this year held the potential to set the country on a course away from sectarianism and toward stability.

Yet politicians have since been unable to form a coalition government and plant the seeds of stability in their country, preferring to take their citizens hostage in their political rivalries, rather than to come to terms with each other. For them, Iraq has become a prized bull on which they have thrown a noose.

The results of this mad competition have become an all-too familiar sight. As political violence continues to take a toll on Iraqi civilians, we have grown accustomed to images of devastated streets in places like Baghdad and Fallujah and of traumatized Iraqis weeping among rubble and debris.

Such images, however, provide little hint of the rich potential the country holds.

Baghdad, after all, once ruled over the Muslim world, and while this glory is long in the past, Iraq is still teeming with enough natural resources and human talent to enable even a mediocre government to feed and protect its citizens. So how can one explain such a stark discrepancy between a nation's grim reality and its unending potential?

The blame, arguably, was once squarely laid on the shoulders of a misguided US leadership. But today, as Iraqis hold the reigns of their country anew, this responsibility has shifted, and it can be attributed first and foremost to the unwillingness of the Iraqi leaders to dream of their nation's future as one.

Time and again, Iraqis have modelled themselves in order to blend in with the world. When the international community called for democracy, they raised their purple fingers without hesitation. When sectarianism took over, they rejected it by voting, wisely so, for secularism in an effort to break away from the sectarian narrative that has motivated much of the bloodshed that characterizes today's Iraq.

But despite their efforts and good intentions, politicians of all origins and stripes have preferred to promote the exclusive benefits of their own religious factions.

Iraq's neighbours have unfortunately exacerbated the intensity of the country's political quagmire by assisting proxies aligned with their sects rather than judging them on their ability to govern.

Competing politicians and powers will, however, eventually have to come to grips with reality: Iraq is indeed a prized bull, but one that is too big to be controlled by one.

Source:

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=117984#axzz0xWCjHq95

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 13 August 2010, Friday

5. Wanted in Iraq: good leadership

The mess that is Iraq today is 'owned,' as they say, by a politician like caretaker Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, as well as his fellow politicians in Iraq. In fact, it's the responsibility of the entire Iraqi political class.

The performance of these politicians constitutes a hazard to Iraq itself, and this week has thrown the spotlight on the impending American draw-down of troops in Iraq.

General Ali Ghaidan, the commander of Iraqi ground forces, told a news conference a few days ago that his troops were '100 percent ready' to assume responsibility for security, as the US prepares to follow through on its withdrawal plans. Then, Iraq's most senior military officer, Lieutenant General Babaker Berbari, said troops weren't, in fact, ready to handle such a task. The last thing that anxious Iraqis want to hear is such an open-ended interpretation of where they stand when it comes to governing and defending the country.

The politicians, in the plural, are responsible for Iraq's ending up in such a state. Kurdish politicians are responsible, as well as Sunnis, and Shiites, and secular politicians, the Arab Nationalists, and even the Baathists – everyone bears some degree of blame for the failure.

For the most part, these politicians have been interacting with each other for the last seven years, under the American umbrella, and they haven't produced a workable way to govern the country. The fundamentally important element of transferring power peacefully from one group to another appears to be beyond their capabilities.

In Iraq's current mosaic, no one group can dominate; the country doesn't need a brutal strongman to enforce order, but rather a set of creative leaders with the leadership skills necessary to keep the country together.

More than six months with no government has followed a phase of rampant corruption, involving everyone's money, and the establishment of mini-authoritarianisms. Now, the security issue re-appears, in the form of deadly bombings and attacks, and total confusion about who can take charge of the situation.

Only Iraqi politicians can fix things: the Americans are ill-equipped to intervene, and no neighbouring state, whether Iran, Syria or Saudi Arabia, represents a magic solution for how Iraq's political system should develop. Iraq's politicians must simply do the hard political work necessary to bring their country under control. Instead of holding meetings in foreign capitals, the country's Parliament needs to be the scene of serious discussion and deal-making.

As the months of drift and decay pile up, the very survival of Iraqi society and the Iraqi state hangs in the balance.

Source:

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=118143#axzz0xWJFhcJx

arab news.com
The Middle East's Leading English Language Daily

Jeddah, Editorial, 13 August 2010, Friday

6. General's statement

For Iraq's top general to have said publicly that the pullout of US troops by the end of next year (2011) is premature was a considerable folly.

Lt. Gen. Babaker Zebari went on to claim his troops might not be able to take control of the military situation for another decade. It is hard to imagine what the general thought he was going to achieve by this outburst, which surely cannot have been authorized by any government figure, if for no better reason than the deplorable fact that over five months after elections, Iraq still has no proper government.

It will be suspected, of course, that Washington may have been behind Zebari's words, since they constitute an invitation for the US to continue its occupation. However, there are powerful factors arguing against US complicity. Barack Obama won the presidency with a clear promise to quit Iraq. The American message has been that the Iraqi police and armed forces have reached a level of competence and equipment where they can assume responsibility for security. Indeed in recent months, much has been made of the fact that very few US troops have been out on the streets, leaving the job of dealing with the violence to the Iraqis. Only in the field of sophisticated signals intelligence is the US likely to have any future role alongside the Iraqi

military. That contribution probably need not involve the continued presence of US boots on the ground.

Besides, if Washington's assurances about the standards achieved by the Iraqi security forces really are nonsense, what does it say about similar protestations over the level of training and efficiency currently being claimed for the Afghan police and military?

Gen. Zebari's words probably therefore need to be weighed against other factors. The dangerous lack of a coherent coalition government is itself contributing to rising instability. The almost half year that Iraqi politicians have wasted so scandalously must have engendered deep concern, not just among the higher echelons of command but through the entire rank and file of the security forces. They see themselves as responsible to the Iraqi people but they need orders, they need policy and they need political support. The politicians who should be providing these are failing in their own responsibilities to Iraqis. Most crucially they are undermining the authority and morale of the men charged with winning and maintaining the peace. The political stalemate is spreading a cancer of uncertainty that must inevitably be straining loyalties in the security forces. They are a mirror of society. As uncertainty continues the risk of greater polarization of different communities increases. Inevitably, this must have an effect on those charged with protecting the country from a renewed campaign of terror. The American occupation must end as planned, because the presence of US troops has been part of the problem. Equally, Iraqis cannot take back control of their country unless they recognize the paramount and urgent need for a stable coalition government. Their abject failure to put national interest before party interest is reprehensible and is sowing the lack of confidence that Zebari's unfortunate statement demonstrates.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article101779.ece>

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 13 August 2010, Friday

7. Iraqis aren't ready to take responsibility

It's a good thing that US troops won't really pull out en masse at the end of the month (August).

Even though US President Barack Obama has promised his people that American troops would cease 'combat operations' in Iraq on 31 August (2010), 'stability operations' will continue. The end of the month will bring no more than a major re-branding of the US Army's business. This may help Obama at home, but it will not put a stop to the deluge of American body bags that continue to be flown back to the US.

'In practical terms, nothing will change,' said General Stephen Lanza, the top American military spokesman in Iraq, when speaking to the New York Times. The hunting and killing of

insurgents, the joint raids with Iraqi security forces, and the manning of check points that search for bombers will continue — as it has for some years. The only difference is that these missions will be described as ‘stability operations’, rather than ‘combat’.

The grim fact is that the Iraqi Army is not yet ready to enforce security in Iraq, and the Americans have an important role which they cannot shirk. The head of the Iraqi army, General Babakir Zebari, caused a huge stir when he said this week that his troops will not be fully trained until 2020 and will not be able to cope with US troop withdrawal. He may be exaggerating for his own purposes, but no one denies that he has a point.

If the Americans simply walked out, they would leave Iraq vulnerable to a new round of civil war that the Iraqi Army would be unlikely to halt. In the worst-case scenario, its soldiers would desert to join various sectarian and tribal militias. The fragility of Iraq’s security is being rammed home every day as bombs go off, leaving tens of people dead. The failure of parliament to agree on a new government, five months after the March general elections, has created a political vacuum in which radical groups see an opportunity.

Source:

<http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/iraqis-aren-t-ready-to-take-responsibility-1.667467>



Dubai, Editorial, 14 August 2010 Saturday

8. Ensuring Iraq’s security

The disclosure by the Chief of Staff of the Iraqi armed forces General Babaker Zebari speaks volumes. It is in complete contradiction to what the United States would like the world believe, that Iraq’s security is under control and US troop withdrawal would continue as per schedule.

Withdrawal per schedule is not something General Zebari would like to see, however. As Iraq’s top military officer, he must be credited with at least having a fair grasp of the ground reality. The security in Iraq, according to him, does not warrant the withdrawal of US troops by the end of next year (2011). Despite Washington’s plans to leave a reserve force of 50,000 troops, withdrawal in his estimate needs to be rolled back at least for another decade.

Interestingly, Iraqi politicians have denounced their military commander’s claim. Some have even laid aspersions at his door, saying he said this to excuse himself in case he is not able to handle the security after the exit of foreign forces.

The general’s stark warning has come at a time when a spike in violence in July (2010) sent alarm bells ringing across the region. The White House has tried to downplay the rising instability and said it was expected because of insurgents’ propensity to stage violent attacks in Ramadan. Any revision in the Status of Forces Agreement (SoFA) with the Iraqi government

that impacts the date of withdrawal will be sure shot suicide for the Obama administration. An extension in the presence of US forces in Iraq is also something Iraqi politicians are loathing to see.

General Zebari has categorically warned that the real problems will start after 2011. While many Iraqis barely tolerate the outside forces' presence, they feel insecure and vulnerable at the prospect of the eventual exit. This brings us to the issue of the operational capability of Iraqi forces to cope with the security challenges lying ahead.

Al Qaeda affiliated terrorist groups still retain sufficient capability to set ablaze the country, especially in a vacuum. Despite the worsening security situation the US refuses to recognise the dangerous fissures appearing in Iraq. Apparently, Obama is satisfied with the security situation and the transition of responsibility to national forces. One can understand this self-delusional state in the context of looming mid-term elections coming up, but is it justifiable to leave Iraq exposed without making adequate arrangements until it is ready to assume responsibility? As we now know, quoting General Zebari, it is not quite ready.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/August/editorial_August25.xml§ion=editorial&col=

TheNational

Abu Dhabi, Editorial, 15 August 2010, Sunday

9. Iraqis have come too far to fail now

A political vacuum in Iraq has persisted for long enough. Five months since Baghdad's national elections, the country lacks a functioning cabinet to devise strategies, approve budgets and manage affairs at home and abroad. The failure of the country's politicians to agree on a new governing coalition and name a new prime minister is threatening the country's fragile calm.

It is, in fact, a stretch to call recent days calm. Al Qaeda in Iraq has found increasing success attacking the country's police force, killing 30 people in Baghdad and Anbar province in the past two weeks. In three separate attacks yesterday, bombings killed eight and wounded more than 30 in and around the capital. And as The National reported yesterday, the government has failed to disarm several militias, who effectively operate outside of its control. 'Saddam Hussein was not powerful enough to disarm us, so Nouri al Maliki certainly isn't,' boasted one militia leader.

Whoever governs Iraq, it is unlikely to get any easier for them. US combat troops are scheduled to leave the country at the end of the month (August 2010). A 50,000-strong 'transitional force' will remain in preparation for a complete US withdrawal by the end of 2011. In light of security

concerns and the country's political failures, some US and Iraqi officials have cast doubt on the prudence of this timetable.

A senior Iraqi army officer, Lt Gen Babaker Zerbari, warned last week that his troops would not be ready to take over if the US military leaves as planned. The former US ambassador to Baghdad Ryan Crocker also weighed in, saying that US troops will have to stay in Iraq 'for a very long period of time' after the pullout date, at least to maintain the weapons systems that US combat forces leave behind.

Of course, there is rarely a shortage of gloomy pronouncements in a war zone before a critical handover. But the recent events out of Iraq and predictions of instability should light a fire under its politicians. Iraq needs a government now.

Perhaps Iraq's politicians have come to this conclusion. Reports in the Arabic press suggest that Mr. al Maliki is losing support from within his own party, the Islamic Dawa, in his candidacy for another term as prime minister. *Asharq al Awsat* reported on Saturday that the Dawa party voted 'unanimously' for a new leader. Negotiations between the National Iraqi Alliance and the State of the Law coalition broke down over the issue of Mr. al Maliki's leadership. And if, in fact, Mr. al Maliki is the main obstacle to the formation of a new government, he ought to consider the country's interests before his own.

Iraq's failure to form a government supports the idea that Iraqis are not capable of self-management, and that a US presence is needed. This also serves to obscure Washington's larger responsibility for what the country has endured since the US-led invasion. Iraqis have sacrificed too much for their politicians to fail them now.

Source:

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100816/OPINION/708159922/1006/pollarchive>



Muscat, Editorial, 20 August 2010, Friday

10. After US pullout, what?

We have won; it's all over. These words of an American soldier leaving Iraq yesterday (19 August) summed up the relief of US combat forces as the last brigade departed ending its mission seven years after invasion. But, in fact, the US involvement is far from over. By pulling out all the combat troops, President Obama has honoured his campaign pledge and the accord his predecessor George Bush had reached with the Iraqi civilian government that Washington would end its mission by the end of next year (2011). However, the 50,000 troops staying back to train Iraqi security forces and advice the civilian government and the 6,000 Special Forces whose tasks are unspecified indicate that Washington would not like the

country to be thrown into an anarchic rule. But ground realities and political uncertainties that have been dogging the country point to mayhem awaiting Iraq. The Tuesday (17 August) attack on an army recruitment centre in Baghdad that killed more than 50 and injured over 100 young Iraqis was only the latest in a string of suicide bomb attacks, raising serious concern about the law and order situation and whether a civilian government could bring the chaotic situation under control.

As it is, there is no effective civilian government since the March (2010) election and political leaders are still wrangling for positions of power even before forming a viable coalition government. Nobody seems to have interested in breaking the political deadlock which has given a fillip to lawless elements to unleash a reign of terror. The future looks bleaker than promising for the war-torn country. Although American troops have ceased their active combat operations against insurgents, letting Iraqi security forces handle them, their mere presence on the streets instil confidence among ordinary people. Now, with every soldier gone, except those in advisory roles, the air is thick with fear. More ominous is when all American troops pull out by next year-end (2011). The key question is will the political leaders resolve their feuds by that time and start governing the country? Or, allow the stalemate to continue?

On the security front, are the Iraqi forces fully prepared, trained and well-equipped to deal with any contingency? On the economic front, will the country generate enough oil wealth to rebuild infrastructure, social and political institutions, set up industries to generate employment and heal the wounds of war? The only answer to all these puzzling questions is political stability and a civilian government. Having left Iraq to its fate and largely in the hands of civilian administration, Americans have little interest to prolong their presence there. Nor do they want to continue to pour in billions in post-war stability. Now their interests will be focused on reaping the rich economic benefits flowing out of massive reconstruction projects in the coming years. The sooner the Iraqi people and their leaders realise this fact the better for them.

Source:

http://www.omantribune.com/archives/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1705&heading=EDITORIALS&archdate=2010-08-20



Dubai, Editorial, 29 August 2010, Sunday

11. Iraq's renewed restlessness

Fear of the unknown once again grips Iraq. With hardly 48-hours to go before US forces relinquish their mandate in the war-weary country, Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki feels jittery. In an unprecedented warning, Maliki has put the nation on top alert for terror attacks.

This is a challenging moment for Iraq's security forces and its intelligence sleuths to ensure that the country do not fall back into the grip of lawlessness and chaos. Though Al Qaeda and the like, which ironically also encompass elements of the ousted Baath party, have time and again

proven their capability to hit below the belt, the government cannot afford to merely sit idle and watch. Apart from beefing up security measures on self-help basis, the need of the hour is to ruthlessly crackdown on unscrupulous elements that do want the liberated political polity to succeed.

A series of deadly blasts last week and that too within a span of hours, across the length and breadth of Iraq can be a forecast of eventualities to come. At least 60 people were killed last Wednesday and scores injured in what seemed to be a backlash from insurgent groups at a time when American military presence is rapidly shrinking. Though the war-weary country had experienced many such bloody episodes, the latest one was with a definite message backed with serious political and strategic ramifications. The crux is that Al Qaeda and the like are neither down nor out. Rather, through such acts they want to convey the impression that invasion, occupation and now withdrawal of foreign forces has hardly impacted their ability to strike at their time of choice. This is not only quite disturbing but also fatal for a dispensation, which is still in its infancy and mired in chaos and uncertainty.

One of the pressing weaknesses these days is the inability of elected representatives to form a new government. Despite the passage of five months, politicians are in a quandary. This has, indeed, buoyed the unscrupulous elements to move in to benefit from the void, and disturb the social polity as much as they can. This governance vacuum along with the withdrawal of US troops is bound to impact adversely. It is incumbent upon Iraqi politicians to work hard for its long-term security and developmental needs. The policy of chasing the shadows hasn't helped; it's time to take it up front.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/August/editorial_August55.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Jeddah, Editorial, 30 August 2010, Monday

12. War and no peace

Tomorrow (1 September), President Barack Obama announces the official end of America's war in Iraq.

But while Obama may want to declare a job 'well done' and quietly slip away, the country is in the grip of a dangerous political and security imbalance that could push it to the edge of collapse. American military officials say that Iraqi soldiers are fully prepared to restore stability to the violence-torn nation. However, despite such assertions, US officials have not been able to produce tangible evidence to support their optimism. Hundreds of people have been killed in recent weeks in a series of roadside bombs, booby-trapped cars and hit-and-run attacks across Iraq.

Iraqi security forces, it seems, are unprepared, remain sharply divided on sectarian and ethnic lines and are not competent to take up their duties. Meanwhile, the onus of ensuring Iraq's security and rebuilding the devastated country now rests with Iraqi leaders, even though they have yet to form a new government almost six months after an election. Even after the end of 'combat operations', the US retains considerable military, political and economic leverage in Iraq. But it is increasingly becoming clear that the US can't lead the country through a peaceful transition.

This is the inevitable result of war and occupation. It is not the exit of US troops from Iraq that could create a security vacuum in the country sparking an internal conflagration and a broader regional conflict. It is the policies followed by the occupying authorities that have created such fears and fears have only increased after the recent increase in violence and the apparent inability of rival political blocs to form a coalition government after parliamentary elections in March left no clear winner. Even if a new government emerges in the immediate future, it will likely be too weak to steer the country through the whirlpool of the conflicting interests of rival sectarian and ethnic groups.

Iraq's imminent problems are not high on the agenda of the White House, which is trying to emphasize Obama's accomplishment ahead of November (2010) elections to bolster fellow Democrats who are likely to lose seats and possibly majorities in one or both houses of Congress. With economic growth slowing and unemployment still near double-digit levels, the White House hopes the symbolic fulfilment of a foreign policy promise will help offset the economic pain at the forefront of voters' minds.

Let's put it this way: Obama was obliged to respond to voters whose opposition to the Iraq conflict helped sweep him into office thanks to his promises to bring the war to an end. He thus took 'an important step forward in ending the Iraq war, and doing so 'responsibly.' Ending the war 'responsibly' is supposed to mean that the over half a million Iraqis, more than 4,000 US troops and \$3 trillion were not lost in vain. That judgment will be debatable for ages but it is clear that, launched 7-1/2 years ago by Obama's predecessor George W. Bush, the war in Iraq is a conflict Americans still don't understand why it started and probably do not understand how it will end.

The US military has now cut its strength to fewer than 50,000 troops in Iraq, and by the end of next year (2011), all US troops will be home if conditions are favourable. That's the end of it for the US but from the Iraqi perspective, a violent chapter is just opening. The country's future is bleak and this may be George W. Bush's great legacy.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article118920.ece>



Editorial, 31 August 2010, Tuesday

13. The War in Iraq

We were glad to see President Obama go to Fort Bliss on Tuesday (31 August) before his Oval Office speech on Iraq, to thank those Americans who most shouldered the burdens of a tragic, pointless war. One of the few rays of light in the conflict has been the distance America has come since Vietnam, when blameless soldiers were scorned for decisions made by politicians.

President George W. Bush tried to make Iraq an invisible, seemingly cost-free war. He refused to attend soldiers' funerals and hid their returning coffins from the public. So it was fitting that Mr. Obama, who has improved veterans' health care and made the Pentagon budget more rational, paid tribute to them.

'At every turn, America's men and women in uniform have served with courage and resolve,' he said on Tuesday night. He added: 'There were patriots who supported this war, and patriots who opposed it. And all of us are united in appreciation for our servicemen and women, and our hope for Iraq's future.'

The speech also made us reflect on how little Mr. Bush accomplished by needlessly invading Iraq in March 2003 — and then ludicrously declaring victory two months later.

Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction proved to be Bush administration propaganda. The war has not created a new era of democracy in the Middle East — or in Iraq for that matter. There are stirrings of democratic politics in Iraq that give us hope. But there is no government six months after national elections.

In many ways, the war made Americans less safe, creating a new organization of terrorists and diverting the nation's military resources and political will from Afghanistan. Deprived of its main adversary, a strong Iraq, Iran was left freer to pursue its nuclear program, to direct and finance extremist groups and to meddle in Iraq.

Mr. Obama graciously said it was time to put disagreements over Iraq behind us, but it is important not to forget how much damage Mr. Bush caused by misleading Americans about exotic weapons, about American troops being greeted with open arms, about creating a model democracy in Baghdad.

That is why it was so important that Mr. Obama candidly said the United States is not free of this conflict; American troops will see more bloodshed. We hope he follows through on his vow to work with Iraq's government after the withdrawal of combat troops.

There was no victory to declare last night, and Mr. Obama was right not to try. If victory was ever possible in this war, it has not been won, and America still faces the daunting challenges of the other war, in Afghanistan.

Mr. Obama, addressing those who either believe that he is not committed to the fight in Afghanistan or believe that he will not leave, said Americans should ‘make no mistake’ — he will stick to his plan to begin withdrawing troops next August (2011). He still needs to clearly explain, and soon, how he will ‘disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda’ and meet that timetable.

As we heard Mr. Obama speak from his desk with his usual calm clarity and eloquence, it made us wish we heard more from him on many issues. We are puzzled about why he talks to Americans directly so rarely and with seeming reluctance. This was only his second Oval Office address in more than 19 months of crisis upon crisis. The country particularly needs to hear more from Mr. Obama about what he rightly called the most urgent task — ‘to restore our economy and put the millions of Americans who have lost their jobs back to work.’

For this day, it was worth dwelling on this milestone in Iraq and on some grim numbers: more than 4,400 Americans dead and some 35,000 wounded many with lost limbs. And on one number that American politicians are loath to mention: at least 100,000 Iraqis dead.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/01/opinion/01wed1.html?ref=editorials>



Editorial, 31 August 2010, Tuesday

14. Iraqis need promises of post-war commitments from the US

The official end of U.S. combat operations in Iraq that President Obama will mark with a speech Tuesday [31 August] night is a milestone but, as we hope Mr. Obama will make clear, hardly an end to America’s involvement or strategic interests in the Middle Eastern country.

For one thing, combat won’t really end on 1 September (2010). Fifty thousand U.S. troops will remain in Iraq, and their duties will include counterterrorism work as well as continuing to train and assist Iraqi forces and supporting US, UN and other civilian operations. For another, as Vice President Biden’s presence in Baghdad Monday (30 August) symbolized, the U.S. government intends to remain engaged in its alliance with Iraq. Right now, the focus must be on encouraging Iraqi politicians to form an inclusive government- that is, a government that represents Iraq’s Kurdish and Sunni Arab minorities as well as the Shiite Arab majority. But the United States also has a diplomatic role to play in helping reintegrate Iraq into regional and international forums while discouraging neighbours, most notably Iran, from meddling.

Whether you initially opposed the war, as did Mr. Obama, or supported it, as we did, it's hard to dispute now that this kind of engagement is needed. A nation of 30 million at the intersection of the Arab and Persian worlds, Iraq is crucial to the region. If it remains on its democratic track, with Sunnis and Shiites settling their differences through politics, the reverberations through the Arab world could be momentous- which is why nearby Arab dictators remain hostile to and resentful of Iraq's development. If the Iraqi people, having turned against al-Qaeda of Iraq, can decisively defeat the terrorists, that, too, will resonate throughout the Muslim world.

Such outcomes are within reach but hardly assured. Iraqi security forces have improved, and they have been taking the lead in cities for months now, but a string of bombings last week showed the continuing danger. Iraqis and their politicians have proved that they don't welcome Iran's interference, but Iran isn't going to give up. Iraq's economy is strengthening, but for many Iraqis daily brownouts and blackouts are an emblem of how life remains maddeningly difficult.

All of which means that what Iraq needs most of all from Americans is patience. All U.S. troops are scheduled to leave by the end of next year (2011), but Mr. Obama should make clear that he is willing to consider extended security cooperation if Iraq's government requests it. And Congress should recognize that short-changing aid, consulates and other tools of U.S. engagement would foolishly risk the enormous investment Americans have made in Iraq's future.

Source:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/30/AR2010083004210.html>

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 1 September 2010, Wednesday

15. Americans have very little to celebrate in Iraq

The US has become a metaphor of sectarianism and official corruption

Iraq today (1 September) is sovereign and independent, Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki declared yesterday (31 August). He was addressing Iraqis to mark the start of the US troops' withdrawal from the occupied country.

US troop numbers were cut to 50,000 in advance of yesterday's milestone as President Barack Obama seeks to fulfil a promise to end the war launched by his predecessor George W. Bush. The six remaining US military brigades will turn their focus to training and advising Iraqi police and troops as Iraq supposedly 'takes responsibility for its own destiny' ahead of the full withdrawal of US forces by the end of next year (2011), according to the Obama plan.

'With the execution of the troop pullout, our relations with the United States have entered a new stage between two equal, sovereign countries,' Al Maliki boasted, stressing the 'two equal' element, although he is certain only few people would actually buy that.

The US still is the occupying power. Washington still dictates policies, mediates between rival factions and decides on big infrastructure projects. The relationship will remain like this for years to come, history says. Big vicious powers are no Caritas. They don't just come, conquer and go. They usually remain 'guests' for as long as possible.

As we applaud the withdrawal of thousands of American troops, moving closer to an independent Iraq, we must look back at why the US is there in the first place.

Bush decided to invade Iraq to 'destroy Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.'

No such weapons were found of course. The war then became a war of 'liberation' to overthrow the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, who has since been tried and executed. Almost a trillion dollars have been spent and more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians and over 4,400 US soldiers killed since the 2003 invasion. But Iraq has yet to be safe or democratic.

The recent bombings underlined the fragility of the security situation and the inability of the police and armed forces to counter the terrorist threat. A senior army officer said last week the Iraqi forces may need ten more years of training to be able to secure the country.

Also, more than five months after the general elections, Iraqi factions continue to quarrel over who should form the new government. The political deadlock threatens the very territorial integrity. Iraq has become a metaphor of sectarianism and official corruption and its people heave a sigh of relief every night because the civil war, which is a real possibility, has yet to begin.

So what is Obama celebrating? The exit of US forces from Iraq, we guess. But why did they go in there in the first place?

Source:

<http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/americans-have-very-little-to-celebrate-in-iraq-1.675846>



Dubai, Editorial, 1 September 2010, Wednesday

16. Rethinking on a new Iraq

It's party time for the United States troops coming back home from Iraq. The formal end of combat operations and their withdrawal, in principle, is a welcome sign altogether. With this development, the Obama administration has fulfilled one of its electoral commitments to pull out of the war-weary Arab country. But has it made any difference for the Iraqis?

The undesired and choreographed episode of invasion, occupation and now withdrawal has not really helped. Rather, it has pushed Iraq deep into the abyss of insecurity, chaos and confusion. What was once one of the richest and most prosperous Arab nation-state is now in ruins, and its

socio-political edifice in tatters. This withdrawal phase at the same time has brought renewed responsibilities on the political dispensation of Baghdad. Unfortunately, it seems unable to handle these.

Seven-and-half years after the invasion, the need of the hour is to indulge in introspection. Promises of democratising Iraq are yet to bear fruit, and the country faces the daunting challenges of rebuilding institutions. One of the blunders of the US interim administration was to scrap its professional army and dismantle bureaucracy. The void is yet to be filled, and efforts to build a national army and police force are proving to be cumbersome. Along with this institutional chaos is the inefficiency of the political apparatus that has not been able to provide good governance. Even after the passage of five months, the two major electoral alliances are far from forming a government of consensus. This has been a setback, testing people's faith in democracy and political parties. A lack of visionary approach is very much evident and it is set to take its toll on a nation that has weathered all storms with resilience and a sense of patriotism.

US Vice President Joe Biden, who was in Iraq to sign off his troops, has made a point. He said that Washington would be closely working with Baghdad, and hopes to see the political impasse resolved at the earliest. The US should ensure that its interaction with the political dispensation is different from its previous approach of bullying. Interfering in grass root issues, however, should not defeat the very purpose of transfer of sovereignty. Let Iraqis take charge of their destiny and rise as a cohesive force. But Washington will be failing in its duties if it doesn't come to its rescue in defeating and dismantling the terror infrastructure. Stability and security of Iraq are of paramount importance, and it is here that Baghdad and Washington should be on the same wavelength.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/September/editorial_September1.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Muscat, Editorial, 1 September 2010, Wednesday

17. Hope and reality

President Barack Obama ended US combat operations in Iraq started by his predecessor George W. Bush seven years ago, honouring his election promise that he would pull out troops by 31 August, 2010. In fact, the active fighting forces had already left a few days ago before the deadline leaving about 50,000 heavily-armed troops behind to assist Iraqi security forces before their final departure next year-end. Obama dispatched Vice- President Joe Biden to mark the end of American war involvement in a symbolic gesture, though his real mission is to

expedite the formation of a government by political parties which have been wrangling over positions of power since March elections. How far he can bring the warring leaders to a common understanding is anybody's guess. That the main political groups, despite American goading, have not been able to form a workable coalition so far clearly demonstrates that their interests lay not in power-sharing for the good of the country but to achieve their own ends. In the continuing political imbroglio, the US washing its hands off war-ravaged and violence-ridden Iraq is seen as shirking its moral responsibility to safeguard the interests of Iraqis. Obama has no choice but to hand over the country to civilian rulers. The battered US economy can hardly sustain continuing American involvement in Iraq after having spent nearly a trillion dollars on a futile bid to find Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and having lost more than 4,400 troops.

Now, it is for Iraqis to set their house in order and look for a future without the Big Brother behind them. It's a tough task, given the complexity of the prevailing political conditions and the massive problems staring in the country's face. It appears they have drowned in the euphoria that bubbled up on Tuesday (31 August). Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki told his countrymen that 'our relations with the United States have entered a new stage between two equal, sovereign countries.' No doubt, Iraq is now a democratic sovereign state. But to guard those credentials with integrity is more complex than earning them. Nevertheless, Maliki is confident of Iraqi security forces defending 'a sovereign and independent country.' It is difficult to share his optimism in view of the recent violence in Baghdad and stray incidents of sectarian strife in the country. We hope Maliki's assurance that 'Iraqi people will live like loving brothers' will come true and normalcy will return as early as possible.

Everybody agrees what is blocking the prospects of peace is the absence of a civilian government. Its formation is more urgent now than ever. The sooner the political leaders realise this fact and start working on a formula the better for the future of the country. With the US military pullback, Washington has a long-term civilian commitment in Iraq.

Once a people's representative government is in place, other countries too could speed up their assistance in economic, cultural and educational fields to reconstruct the war-torn country. Further delay in government set-up doesn't augur well either for people or the economic regain of the country. The Iraqi leaders who are confident of running the country and managing its affairs should prove to the world that thousands of Iraqis who have lost their lives and homes are worth their sacrifices.

Source:

http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1716&heading=EDITORIAL



Muscat, Editorial, 2 September 2010, Thursday

18. Testing time for Obama

Every beginning has an ending. So is the case with US war in Iraq. More than seven years of military involvement, ostensibly to destroy weapons of mass destruction and establish democracy, President Barack Obama closed a bloody chapter in the long American war history with a spirited speech from his Oval Office, only the second so far after assuming office, seen as a morale boosting one to a country sagging under monumental economic problems, partly caused by Iraqi and Afghan wars. While it is debatable whether Washington has achieved its mission in Iraq after a huge loss of men, material and the taxpayer's money, Obama has used the occasion to address the immediate concerns: To restore voters' confidence in his presidency and party in the November (2010) congressional elections and to counsel patience on economy. He has made nursing the economy back to sound health and restoring millions of jobs for Americans as his central mission in the days to come. We need not dismiss these words as empty rhetoric to pep up a disillusioned electorate which is increasingly turning to Republicans. Apparently, Obama is hoping that the pullout of combat troops from Iraq and Afghan withdrawal in August next year (2011) as per his set timetable would give him enough time to focus on pressing domestic problems. But until then his hands are still full as he is bogged down in war on terrorism primarily focused on Afghanistan and Middle East peace.

No doubt, he extricated himself from Iraq without giving any commitment to the war-torn country about the remaining 50,000 troops still based in Iraq to advise and assist the security forces would do if the situation goes out of control. Instead, in his address, he urged Iraqi leaders to form a government which, in a way, is telling the fractious nation to set its house in order without looking for Washington's help. The Obama administration appears to be looking at that kind of exit strategy from Afghanistan as well. The deadline set for Afghan pullout is so unrealistic that a tangible outcome in the US war against insurgents or a strong civilian government emerging in Kabul is unthinkable. A decade of fighting in treacherous mountainous regions has not helped the world to ward off terrorist threats. The futility of these two wars is increasingly telling on the American public and its exasperation is manifest in opinion polls. Will Obama's efforts to bring to an end the American military involvement, including total withdrawal of troops from the warring zones, help him douse the flames of discontentment among people?

Hardly because his stakes in the new round of Middle East peace talks in Washington are too high to be ignored. Obama has invested his reputation, time and good will in bringing Palestinian and Israeli leaders to a negotiating table after a prolonged impasse. Though nobody is expecting a spectacular breakthrough at the talks, a modicum of success in keeping the ball rolling until a final solution is reached will help Obama in shoring up his image. The breakthrough has to come

before the November polls to trumpet the most significant achievement of Obama's presidency. That will serve as a trump card for Democrats to turn the tables on opponents. Will it happen?

Source:

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