

PROGRESS IN IRAQ IS EITHER TEMPORARY OR ILLUSORY

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There was never a good war of a bad peace. A reckless war destroys in one year what man took many years to create. –Ben Franklin

On Monday March 10, 2008, eight American soldiers were killed in central Baghdad, even though 57 new security stations have been set up around the city. Over the past two weeks, hundreds of Iraqis have been killed in the capital city in a spate of suicide bombings.

Even though violence is down across Iraq, it is up dramatically in Mosul, the third largest city once secured by General Petraeus. As of September, 2007, militants again controlled most of the city's districts. On January 23, 2008, 25 tons of explosives were set off, wounding 224 and killing 34 in the largest insurgent bombing of the war.

In early March, 2008, Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad received a rousing welcome in Baghdad, the first official state visit from any Mideast leader. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki declared that the talks were "friendly, positive, and full of trust."

President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd who speaks the Iranian language Farsi and took Iran's side in the devastating Iran-Iraq war, was especially friendly to Ahmadinejad. Talabani asked the Iranian president to call him "Uncle Jalal" and they held hands and kissed each other.

Iraqi government supports Iran's project to enrich uranium, and it does not perceive it as a threat to its security. Iran has given Iraq \$1 billion in loans, and trade and investment is increasing daily. Iranian pilgrims stream over the border to visit the holy sites of Shia Islam in Najaf and Karbala.

GOP Congressman Jim Paxton warns that if the U.S. withdraws, there will be a bloody civil war and Iran will dominate the country. The first phase of a civil war has already been fought and the Shias have won, and, even more significantly, so has Shiite Iran.

Chas Freeman, former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, states: "The American military occupation of Iraq has facilitated an Iranian occupation of Iraq." "Instead of isolating the 'rouge state' Iran," says Robert Sheer, "the Bush administration has catapulted the theocrats in Tehran into the center of Mideast political power."

Ahmadinejad did not travel to the Shiite dominated South, and lack of security was most likely the reason. While British troops sit out at the airport doing nothing, conflict among Shiite militias has increased in Basra, the second largest city.

In a country once known for the liberation of its women, it is especially troubling to learn that dozens of women have been murdered. The reason is clear: the assassins leave notes saying that they were not dressed properly.

Violence is down primarily because the Shiite Medhi Army has honored a cease fire order, and tens of thousands of former Sunni insurgents have joined Sahwa, Arabic for "awakening." In return for \$300 per month from Uncle Sam, Sahwa forces have agreed to attack Al Qaeda instead of Americans.

The long term loyalty of the Sahwa is questionable and the Shia dominated central government does not approve of this risky experiment. Already some of Sahwa militiamen have been arrested, and as one reporter wrote: "Many believe that large numbers of Sahwa forces are resistance fighters simply riding the surge." After American forces leave, Sunni and Shiite militants may well start the second phase of their civil war.

American advisors believe that Iraqi army will ready to fight on its own next year, but the Iraqi defense minister says that Iraq's security forces will need American help until 2018. Iraqi soldiers get one week off after two week's duty, while U.S. troops get two weeks off every year. Are we being played the fool?

In a report to Congress Retired Marine General James Jones concluded that the Iraqi police force is so corrupt that it should be disbanded completely. Most Iraqis, especially Sunnis, do not trust the police, and they turn either to Sahwa or the Americans for protection.

Baghdad has power an average of 7 hours per day, and oil production is still 100,000 barrels a day behind pre-invasion levels. While U.S. financed reconstruction projects founder, the Iraqi government has spent only 4.4 percent of the \$10 billion in oil money assigned for this purpose.

The Kurds in the North have signed lucrative oil deals with foreign firms, but the central government says that the contracts will not be honored. The Kurds refuse to fly that Iraqi flag, and they maintain their own army, the most capable forces in Iraq.

There is a very good possibility that the Kurds will declare an independent Kurdistan in the near future. (In the 2005 election 90 percent voted for independence.) It is not inconceivable that the Shias in the south will also secede and leave the Sunni dominated provinces and Baghdad without any oil revenue.

The creation of Sahwa has dramatically reduced violence in Anbar province, but anti-American sentiment is still high. The chorus of the most popular song in Falluja is "Great was the victory over the Americans." A 2007 poll with extensive in-depth questioning found that 31 percent blame the violence on the U.S. while only 18 percent accuse Al Qaeda. In 2004 only 17 percent agreed that attacks on coalition forces were OK, but that figure has now risen to 51 percent.

A benchmark formula offered by the Brookings institute indicated that the Iraqi government had achieved only 5 goals out of 11. Even after intense lobbying by the Bush administration, a crucial bill on provincial elections was sent back for

reconsideration. Out of 37 cabinet posts, 15 are not filled. A parliamentary quorum is rarely achieved, because many parliamentarians live out of country or cannot travel because of poor security. According to Transparency International, Iraq has fallen from 113th to 178th as one of the most corrupt nations in the world.

What kind of democracy is this where the voting fall almost exactly on either religious or ethnic lines? It would be as if all Catholics and Jews voted for Democrats and all Protestants voted for Republicans. Bush can call Iraq a democracy only because it has held some elections, not because it has the basic civic institutions and national consensus necessary for a robust liberal democracy.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has estimated that there are a total of 4.2 million displace persons in Iraq, 2.2 million internally and most of the others are in Jordan and Syria. Many of those who have returned have found their houses occupied and their neighborhoods cleansed of either Sunnis or Shias.

A UN report found that between February, 2006 and October, 2007, more than twice as many Iraqis crossed the border to Syria than came back. Only 14 percent interviewed by the UN said that they were returning because of improved security.

The surge has not produced the reconciliation that was its goal; rather, Baghdad is not partitioned by 3-meter concrete walls separating Sunnis and Shias, who have lived together and even married each other for centuries.

A recent Brookings Institute study concluded that terrorist acts have increased sevenfold since the invasion of Iraq. Islamic militants around the world have answered Bush's call "Bring them on!" with a rousing "Yes, we can!"

The invasion of Iraq has not only produced more terrorists, but has it has led to many more deaths per capita than under Saddam Hussein. It has not brought anything resembling democracy to the country, even after the sacrifice of 4,000 American lives. The invasion has strengthened Iran's hand in the Middle East and it has tarnished America's reputation around the world.

Progress in Iraq is temporary, as the cases of Mosul and Basra demonstrate, or, as the rise of an Iraqi-Iranian Shiite alliance proves, illusory.