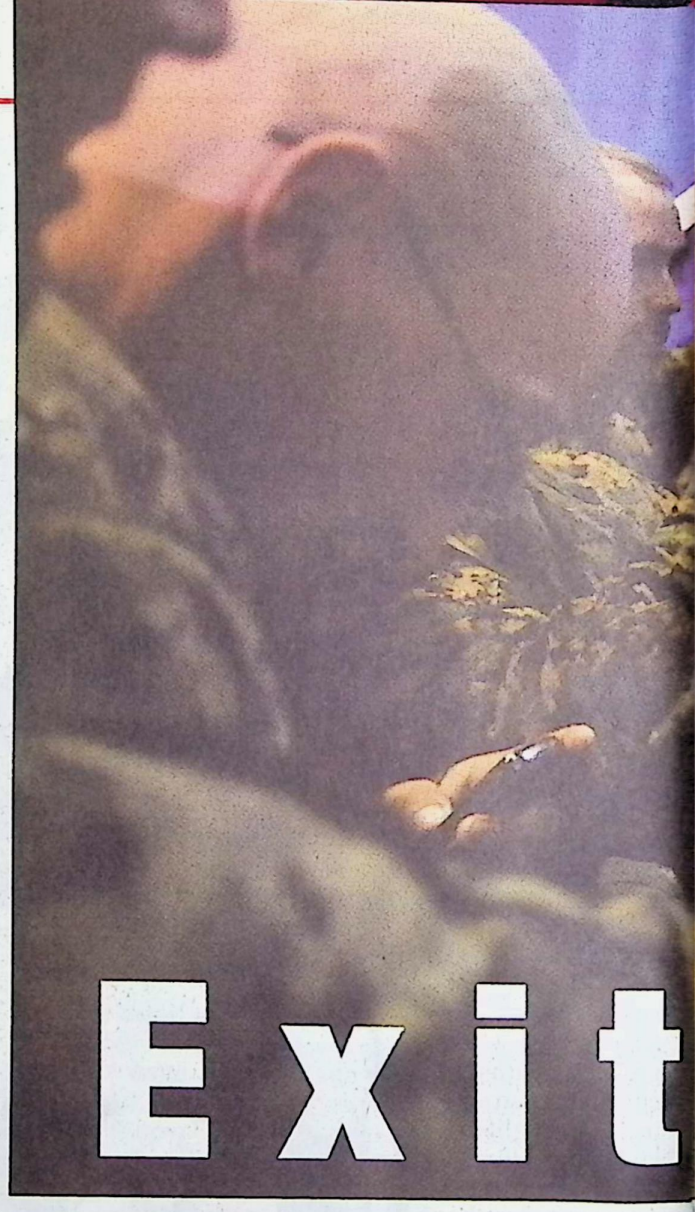


# Exit

NADER RAHMAN

When Barack Obama walked into Camp Lejeune on the 27th of February, his secret was out. Around the world people knew he was going to announce an end to the war in Iraq, without really knowing how or when. After warming up his military audience he went straight into it, "Let me say this as plainly as I can: by August 31, 2010, our combat mission in Iraq will end." There were no euphoric celebrations in Iraq, but around the world there were both tears of ecstasy and agony. But for those who chose to read between the lines this was not really an end to the war, it was a diversion of resources from one half-failed conflict to another. Goodbye Iraq and hello Afghanistan.

Obama has found himself in a tricky situation with regard to the American armed forces. From the outset he claimed to be against the war in Iraq and in Camp Lejeune he had to awkwardly announce an end to a war he never wanted. He thanked the armed forces by saying, "this war has been one of the most extraordinary chapters of service in the history of our nation," and went on o say, "the men and women of the United States military ave served with honour, and succeeded beyond any xpectation." For those who knew his stance the words seemed slightly hollow, he was essentially thanking them for fighting an unjust war. But Obama's moral stance will come under increased scrutiny in the following months as he sets himself on a collision course with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

When Obama started his campaign trail to the presidency just over two years ago, he openly stood against the George W. Bush's 'surge'. When Bush announced that he was going to send an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq, most liberals were up in arms over the move. They claimed it would only deepen the mire in Iraq. As it turned out that very surge set the foundation for a stable Iraq, the same relatively stable Iraq Obama hopes to move out of. Obama's plan for Iraq will not actually bring the war to an end, but essentially will be kind of a mini surge. Why? One might ask. The answer is quite simple, while he could logically have approved a phased withdrawal leaving behind a residual number of 15 or 20,000. He instead chose to keep between 35 and 50,000 troops on the ground in Iraq from the 1st of September 2010 to the end of 2011. For a man who never wanted a war and one who claims to end it by August 2010, the residual number of troops is hard to justify. While 20,000 could have done, by keeping on up to 50,000 he has created his own mini surge of 30,000.

His plan has been praised and attacked in equal measure, as many republicans ruefully looked at his speech as one McCain may have given had he been elected. The war is nearing its natural end and Obama is taking the credit for ending it. The truth of the matter is that by the end of 2011 all combat troops would have left Iraq (after America agreed to Iraq's security pact) and by decreasing the force by 65% in 18 months all he has done is to loosely keep his campaign promise. All of a sudden he is the man who ended the madness, the messiah. But how does he justify the force of 50,000 which will continue to conduct counter-terrorism missions. While there will be no combat mission per se, those on the ground will be combat capable and will in all likelihood be involved in some form of battle or another. This is not the end of the war that liberals had hoped for, neither is it the end of the war Obama promised the world and America. It is a strategically deft move which gives the impression of the end of the conflict but in all other ways is nowhere near that target. What is also not mentioned in polite company is that Robert Gates, the Defence Secretary has at other times claimed that the United States is prepared to keep a 'modest' military presence past 2011 if the Iraqi government wishes.

Away from Iraq most people in Afghanistan and Pakistan must be preparing for the worst as Obama's