

US lowers flag to end Iraq war

AFP, Baghdad
US formally marked the end of Iraq war with a low-key ceremony near Baghdad yesterday, after nearly nine years of divisive war that began with the invasion to oust Saddam Hussein.

The "casing of the colours" near the airport, the first site the US occupied in Baghdad in 2003, comes with around 4,000 US soldiers still in Iraq, all of whom will depart in the coming days.

At that point almost no American troops will remain in a country where there were once nearly 170,000 on more than 500 bases.

The withdrawal ends a war that left tens of thousands of Iraqis and nearly 4,500 American soldiers dead, many more wounded, and 1.75 million Iraqis displaced, after the US-led invasion unleashed brutal sectarian fighting.

"After a lot of blood spilled by Iraqis and Americans, the mission of an Iraq that could govern itself has become real," US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said at the symbolic flag-lowering ceremony.

Panetta described the US withdrawal as "nothing short of miraculous" and "one of the most complex logistical undertakings in US military history."

Yesterday's ceremony comes a

most extraordinary chapters in the history of the American military will come to an end. Iraq's future will be in the hands of its people. America's war in Iraq will be over.

It brings to an end nearly nine

years of US military involvement in Iraq, beginning with a "shock and awe" campaign in 2003 that many in Washington believed would see US forces conclude their mission in Iraq within months.

Obama's predecessor Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq in 2003, arguing Saddam was endangering the world with weapons of mass destruction programmes. Saddam was ousted from power and later executed, but such arms were never found.

Instead, a bloody Sunni Arab insurgency led to widespread communal bloodshed, with more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians reported killed in the years since the invasion, according to British NGO Iraq Body Count.

That was only quelled when then-president George W Bush ordered a "surge" of American troops to Iraq.

The pullout, enshrined in the changing US role in Iraq, from 2003-2004 when American officials ran the country to 2009 when the United Nations mandate ended, and last summer when Washington officially ended combat operations.

Some US observers also fear a return to bloody sectarianism, doubt the strength of Iraq's political structures, and feel that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who hails from the Shiite majority, has entrenched his



The flag-lowering ceremony marks the end of US forces mission in Iraq. PHOTO: AFP

power base to the detriment of the country's minorities.

Besides, hundreds of people in Fallujah, site of two of the fiercest battles of the Iraq war, marked the impending

departure of American forces by burning US flags and shouting slogans in support of the "resistance."

The tone of the departure reflects Sergeant Teddy

Loftis' belief, one of the 160-odd soldiers seated for the ceremony.

"We accomplished our mission, but we don't feel like we've won," he said.

TIMELINE - US TROOPS IN IRAQ

- ⇒ March 2003 - Operation Iraqi Freedom begins with an assault on Baghdad
- ⇒ May 2003 - President George Bush declares "mission accomplished"
- ⇒ Dec 2003 - Saddam Hussein captured in a bunker south of Tikrit
- ⇒ April 2004 - Photos emerge showing abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison
- ⇒ 2005 - Suicide attacks in Iraq hit all-time high as insurgency spreads
- ⇒ January 2007 - US troop "surge" begins, leading to a drop in violence by 2008
- ⇒ August 2010 - Last US combat troops leave Iraq

day after US President Barack Obama honoured America's "bleeding and building" in Iraq, hailing the "extraordinary achievement" of a war he once branded "dumb".

"It is harder to end a war than to begin one," Obama said. "One of the

years of US military involvement in Iraq, beginning with a "shock and awe" campaign in 2003 that many in Washington believed would see US forces conclude their mission in Iraq within months.

Obama's predecessor Bush

Putin says US involved in Gaddafi killing

AFP, Moscow
Russia's Vladimir Putin implicated Washington yesterday in the killing of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi and launched a tirade against Senator John McCain in an extraordinary attack on US policies.

The Russian premier used his annual televised phone-in to unleash the type of no-holds-barred attack that characterised his 2000-2008 term as president.

Putin turned stone-faced when asked about a tweet from McCain -- one of Washington's fiercest critics of Putin -- warning Russia it faced an "Arab spring" revolt over the disputed December 4 parliamentary elections.

"Mr McCain fought in Vietnam. I think that he has enough blood of peaceful citizens on his hands. It must be impossible for him to live without these disgusting scenes anymore," Putin said in reference to Gaddafi.

"Who did this?" Putin demanded. "Drones, including American ones."

"They attacked his column. Then using the radio -- through the special forces, who should not have been there -- they brought in the so-called opposition and fighters, and killed him without court or investigation."

The Pentagon immediately dismissed the charge as "ludicrous".



Syrian rebels kill 27 soldiers in south

Regime gave forces order to kill: HRW

AGENCIES

gunmen have killed 1,100 of his forces. But a report published by Human Rights Watch yesterday, based on interviews with dozens of defectors, said army commanders have ordered troops to use "all means necessary" to halt protests, often giving explicit instructions to open fire.

One special forces soldier said his brigade was told to "use as many bullets as you want" on protesters in Deraa in April. A sniper in the city of Homs said his commanders ordered that a specific percentage of demonstrators should die. "For 5,000 protesters, for example, the target would be 15 to 20 people," he told Human Rights Watch (HRW).

HRW identified 74 commanders who ordered, authorized or condoned killings, torture and unlawful arrests during the anti-government protests. "These abuses constitute crimes against humanity," it said, calling on the United Nations Security Council to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.

The United Nations says 5,000 people have been killed in Assad's crackdown on protests inspired by uprisings elsewhere in the Arab world. Assad has denied any orders were issued to kill demonstrators and says

Army deserters killed 27 soldiers in southern Syria yesterday, an activist group said, in some of the deadliest attacks on forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad since the start of an uprising nine months ago.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the clashes flared in the southern city of Deraa, where protests against Assad first erupted in March, and at a checkpoint east of the city where all 15 personnel manning it were killed.

It did not say how they broke out, but the high casualties among security forces suggested coordinated strikes by the army rebels who have escalated attacks in recent weeks, raising the specter of Syria slipping towards civil war.

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Threat forced Zardari to Dubai: PM

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari was forced to seek treatment in Dubai because of threats to his life if he attended a Pakistani hospital, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said Wednesday.

Speaking in the Senate, the prime minister said that the government and the president's family convinced Zardari to go to Dubai for treatment last week because there was a risk he would be attacked if he had treatment in Pakistan.

"He (President Zardari) was ill, he feared life threats in Pakistan hospitals, that was the reason he did not want to go to any hospital of Pakistan," the prime minister said in his address in the Senate.

One in five US women victim of rape: Study

AFP, Washington

Nearly one in five American women have been victims of rape or attempted rape at some point in their lives, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) said Wednesday in a disturbing report on sexual violence in the United States.

Releasing the results of a first-ever survey of nearly 10,000 women contacted randomly by telephone in 2010, the federal agency said 18.3 percent of women "have been raped at some time in their lives."

Just over half of female rape victims (51.1 percent) said they had been targeted by an "intimate partner" -- a current or former partner or spouse -- and 40.8 percent by an acquaintance.

It also found that 1.3 million women had been raped during the year preceding the survey -- a substantially higher number than the 188,380 rapes and sexual assaults cited in a Department of Justice crime survey for 2010.

And it revealed that 24.3 percent of women -- and nearly one in seven men -- have suffered "severe physical violence" at the hands of an intimate partner, such as being hit, slammed against a surface, or beaten.

"This landmark report paints a clear picture of the devastating impact these violent acts have on the lives of millions of Americans," Health Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said.

The report also touched upon male rape, finding that one in 71 men -- nearly five percent of all American men -- had been raped in their lifetime.

NEWS IN brief

Gaddafi Killing: ICC probe urged

AFP, The Hague

The daughter of slain Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi has asked the International Criminal Court if it will probe the killing of her father and her brother, her lawyer said Wednesday.

The lawyer Nick Kaufman said he had written to ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo asking for more information on the October 20 killing of Muammar Gaddafi and his son Muatassim Gaddafi.

The former dictator and his son were killed after their capture by forces loyal to the National Transitional Council.

Iceland recognises Palestine

AFP, Reykjavik

Iceland formally recognised the Palestinian state at a ceremony in Reykjavik yesterday, becoming one of the few Western European countries and Nato members to do so.

"This is the day I formally submit to you the declaration of Palestine independence in accordance with the will of the Icelandic parliament," Icelandic Foreign Minister Oeissur Skarphedinnsson said, addressing his Palestinian counterpart Riad Malki at a news conference.

More than 100 countries around the world have recognised the Palestinian state.

US passes 'indefinite detention' bill

AL-JAZEERA ONLINE

The US House of Representatives has voted in favour of controversial proposed legislation that would deny terror suspects, including US citizens, the right to trial and permit authorities to detain them indefinitely.

The proposed changes were included in a \$662bn defence bill passed on Wednesday by the Republican-controlled House after White House officials withdrew a threat to block the bill over concerns it would undermine the US president's authority over counterterrorism activities.

In a statement, Jay Carney, a White House spokesman said "several important changes" had been made, which meant that presidential advisors would not recommend Barack Obama veto the bill.

The bill, which also endorsed tougher sanctions against Iran's central bank and freezing \$700 million in aid to Pakistan, must still pass through the Senate, which was expected to vote yesterday.

If approved, the bill would require the US military to take custody of terror suspects accused of involvement in plotting or committing attacks against the United States.

'Angelina Jolie touched our souls'

Say Bosnia's rape victims

GUARDIAN ONLINE

"I first vomited, from the sheer force of my suffering," Enisa Salcinovic says of her initial reaction to In the Land of Blood and Honey, Angelina Jolie's directorial debut feature film about the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Her reaction was so visceral, she said, because the film, which she watched in an exclusive preview for survivors of concentration camps, and victims of wartime rape and mass killings, so captured the trauma she experienced. "Angelina touched our souls," she tells me several hours later, still clutching a wad of tissues tightly in her fist.

Salcinovic is the president of the Women's Division of Sarajevo's Association of Concentration Camp Survivors. Of the 8,000 or so members, approximately one quarter are rape survivors.

The film portrays a romance between Danijel (Goran Kostic), a Serb man, and Ajla (Zana Marjanovic), a Bosniak Muslim woman, which blossoms as the



a concentration camp and Danijel is her jailer.

Since Jolie announced her intention to film, the plot has been a source of controversy in Bosnia, a country still struggling with the legacy of a war which pitted Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks against one another and cost an estimated 100,000 lives. The data on rape victims is not concrete: the United Nations estimates that "20,000 to 50,000 women and girls fell victim to what has been described as a 'massive, organised and systematic' use of rape as both a weapon of war

and a form of ethnic cleansing".

It has even exposed schisms between groups of female rape victims. Some activists, such as Salcinovic, laud Jolie for raising important questions about the still-taboo subject of wartime rape and ongoing marginalisation of victims. Others, such as Bakira Hasecic, president of the Women Victims of War Association, remain adamant that a "Hollywood outsider" could never be qualified to make a film about the war.

This debate started last year when Jolie, primed to shoot the entire movie on location in Bosnia, was forced to relocate to Hungary when Hasecic lobbied the minister of culture of one of Bosnia's two political entities, the Federation, to revoke the permit.

However Saric agrees that rather than the question of whether Jolie can present a fictionalised narrative about war rape, the real discourse should focus on wartime rape itself, a topic they both agree remains taboo, which means women are still living in poor conditions.

Vital time wasted

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house in Narsingdi.

"On my repeated requests, they took me to the hospital by an auto-rickshaw at about 11:00am, nearly three hours after the incident. On the way to hospital, they threatened to throw me out of the vehicle, if I told the story to anyone," said Jui, an HSC second-year student of Narsingdi College.

Jui was taken to nearby Bangladesh Medical College Hospital from her sister-in-law's house in the capital's cantonment area.

When the doctors asked how her hand got cut off, Rafiq and his sister told them that she lost it in an accident. But the doctors did not believe it, and kept on pressing for the truth.

"Then I recounted to them the incident, and requested a doctor to call my parents," she said.

Following a call from the physician, Jui's father, her

maternal uncle and a cousin rushed to the hospital, and later took her to Pangu Hospital in the afternoon.

Jui's husband Rafiq, an expatriate worker in the UAE, accompanied them to Pangu Hospital.

When doctors at Pangu hospital asked Rafiq about the detached hand for joining it to the arm, he told them that physicians at Bangladesh Medical College Hospital had cut off her hand, said Jui's father Yunus Mia.

"As we and the doctors repeatedly requested him to tell the truth, Rafiq finally said he dumped the severed hand into a dustbin", Yunus said.

They along with Rafiq recovered four fingers of Jui's hand from the dustbin, but could not find the other finger, he said.

When they returned to the hospital with the four fingers, the doctors told

them that all cells of the fingers had become inactive, and it was too late to attach them to the limb.

Mohammad Salaudhin, officer-in-charge of the Cantonment Police Station, said they had preserved the fingers as proof of the crime, adding that Rafiq is currently in jail.

Jui and her father alleged that Rafiq's sister Naima and his brother-in-law Corporal Shafiqul Islam were involved in the crime and had been aware of Rafiq's plot to hack off Jui's hand.

"They had asked me to go to their house on December 1 when Rafiq was in Dubai. But Rafiq unexpectedly showed up there three days later," said Jui.

"Rafiq's sister and brother-in-law left the house minutes after Rafiq turned up there. Sensing trouble, I requested them not to leave us alone, but they ignored my call."

"Rafiq had phoned me

from Dubai on November 30, and said he had sent some gifts for me. He asked me to collect them from his sister's house," she said.

Rafiq's sister and brother-in-law also asked Jui to collect the gifts from their house. "But when I went there on December 1, they said Rafiq had not sent any gifts. They asked me to stay there."

Jui was brought to her parents' house in Narsingdi from Dhaka on December 6. She is now receiving treatment at Narsingdi District Hospital.

Her father sought financial help from the government and people for proper treatment of his daughter, and for the legal battle that lies ahead.

Yunus said he tried to include the names of Rafiq's sister and her husband Shafiqul in the case he filed with the Cantonment Police Station.

But police refused to

Chirac found guilty of graft

AFP, Paris

Popular former French president Jacques Chirac was convicted of graft yesterday but escaped jail, receiving a suspended two-year sentence for running ghost workers at Paris city hall.

The 79-year-old statesman, who was excused from court on medical grounds, was found guilty of influence peddling, breach of trust and embezzlement between 1990 and 1995, when he was mayor of the French capital.

In all, 19 fake jobs were created in Paris and its suburb Nanterre between 1990 and 1995, ahead of Chirac's successful presidential bid.

In their ruling, judges said Chirac's behaviour had cost Paris taxpayers the equivalent of \$1.8 million.

He is the first president of modern France to be tried, although Nazi-era collaborator leader Philippe Petain was convicted of treason and the country's last king, Louis XVI, was sent to the guillotine in 1793.

Chirac was president of France between 1995 and 2007 and as such enjoyed legal immunity. He denied all the charges, but the case is only one of many corruption scandals to have dogged him in a long public career.

He was tried alongside nine alleged accomplices.



include their names, and said the inclusion would make the case weak.

However, Salaudhin, officer-in-charge of the police station, refuted the allegation, and said he recorded the case according to the statement of the victim's family.

Rafiq's brother-in-law Shafiq also rebutted the allegations against him and his wife Naima. Shafiq said he and his wife did not have any clue about Rafiq's plot.

HOW IT HAPPENED

It was around 8:00am. Jui's husband Rafiq took her into a room and locked her in.

"He told me that he would like to give me a surprise, and covered my eyes with my scarf. I could sense that he was angry with me, but I dared not protest," Jui said.

"Then, he asked me why I continued my studies despite his objections."

"I told him that I would sit

for the HSC examination, and then quit studies. But he taped my mouth shut, and asked me to put my right hand on a table."

"Suddenly, Rafiq said he would put an end to my studies, and then hacked off my hand."

As Jui started groaning in pain, Rafiq's sister and brother-in-law broke into the room.

Jui said her husband had earlier told her that his parents did not like her studying.

She is still very upbeat about carrying on studies despite losing the right hand.

"I will try my best to continue studies. Despite my husband's strong opposition, I continued studies with a desire to become a lawyer", Jui said.

"I need help from the government and people to get justice and fulfil my dream."