

Balance sheet of the US war with Iraq

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FINALLY, the US forces have retreated from Iraq after being exhausted of long nine years of illegal occupation that the world witnessed when President Bush Junior launched his campaign in 2003; defying worldwide public opinion. The future event in international politics will say whether this is Barack Obama's election strategy or a preparation of deploying troops elsewhere.

Iraq had a major role in the development of the Muslim Arab civilisation, that is where Islamic Arab civilisation reached out to the whole world. The Iraqi capital Baghdad was built in 145 A.H./ 762 A.D. at the reign of the Caliph Abu Ja'afar al-Mansur, on the west bank of the Tigris. Baghdad had a distinguished role in the political and intellectual events that took place in the Arab Islamic world in particular and in the whole world in general.

Unfortunately, Iraq became unstable and totally in chaos after the US tried to export freedom and American values to Iraq, following a series of crisis that erupted in the Middle East region where US had active interest. And because of nine years of looting Iraqi wealth, killing millions of innocent men and women, violating human rights, molesting her sovereignty, Iraq by any standard cannot be called a self-reliant country at this moment.

The recent history reveals that it is the US policy that has not allowed Iraq to become self-reliant instead the country's armed forces, its economy and entire social fabric has been systematically destroyed by the US forces during the entire period of nine years of occupation.

The seeds of destruction of Iraq started long before the US occupation, after the US became an ally of Iraq in the early eighties. The diplomatic relations with Iraq had been severed shortly after the 1967 Arab-Israeli

Six-Day War. A decade later, following a series of major political developments in the Middle East region, particularly after the Iranian revolution and the seizure of embassy in 1979- 81 Iran hostage crises, President Jimmy Carter ordered to review the American policy towards Iraq.

The Islamic revolution in Iran upset the entire strategic equation in the region. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, America's major ally in the Persian Gulf was overthrown, and no one else could replace him as the guarantor of the US interests in the region. The US was in search of a new ally in the region to counter balance Iran and found ambitious Saddam Hussein.

There were considerable evidences that the US gave green signal to Saddam Hussein to launch war against Iran in the year 1980 which continued till 1988. The US actively supported the Iraqi war effort by supplying the Iraqis with billions of dollars of credits, by providing US military intelligence and advice to the Iraqis, and by closely monitoring third country arms sales to Iraq to make sure that Iraq had the military weaponry required.

The US also provided strategic operational advice to the Iraqis to better use their assets in combat. The CIA, including both CIA Director Casey and Deputy Director Gates, knew of, approved of, and assisted in the sale of non-US origin military weapons, ammunition and vehicles to Iraq.

There were reports in media that the Senior Bush, operating largely behind the scenes throughout the 1980s, initiated and supported much of the financing, intelli-

gence and military help that built Iraq into the power it became as a strategy to counter balance Iran.

The war with Iran drained out the Iraqi resources to a great extent. Iraq was in debt amounting more than \$60 billion. Beside the US, many other Gulf countries supported Iraq against the war with Iran including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Iraq was in urgent need of funds to rebuild the country and only source was earning from oil revenue.



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To recover from crippling economy, Iraq wanted that the international oil price be increased by decreasing oil production but was not able to do so because of non cooperation of another OPEC member Kuwait. According to former Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, "every US\$1 drop in the price of a barrel of oil caused a US\$1 billion drop in Iraq's annual revenues triggering an acute financial crisis in Baghdad". It was estimated that between 1985 and 1989, Iraq lost US\$14 billion a year due to Kuwait's oil price strategy.

Kuwait's refusal to decrease its oil production was viewed by Iraq as an act of aggression against her which was further

aggravated when Iraq alleged that Kuwait was slant-drilling across the international border into Iraq's Rumaila field. However, many believe that Iraq intention was to create a pressure on Kuwait to get the relief of debt that Iraq owes to Kuwait.

Failing to solve the dispute with Kuwait through negotiations, Iraq was ready to settle the score through military means. On July 25, President Saddam Hussein summoned the US Ambassador to Baghdad, April Glaspie, to his office; explained Iraq's position who told Saddam Hussein that Washington, "inspired by the friendship and not by confrontation, does not have an opinion" on the disagreement between Kuwait and Iraq, stating "we have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts."

She also let Saddam Hussein know that the US did not intend "to start an economic war against Iraq." These statements may have trapped Saddam to believe he had received a diplomatic green light from the United States to invade Kuwait.

Later in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings, Ambassador Glaspie testified that she had repeatedly warned Saddam Hussein that the US would not tolerate the use of force in ending Iraq's dispute with Kuwait, but secret cables made public on July 12 appeared to many showed Ms. Glaspie was actually less than forceful about the warning.

Sen. Cranston characterised the inconsistencies between Ms. Glaspie's testimony and the secret cables, an attempt by Ms. Glaspie to deliberately mislead Congress about the origins of the Persian Gulf War.

Iraq invasion to Kuwait took a complete U-turn in the US-Iraq relationship and Iraq had to pay a heavy price for the aggression. Iraq was evicted from Kuwait by coalition force under the US leadership. Iraq suffered a humiliating defeat and his forces were routed. Senior Bush kept the objective limited and as such there was little controversy of first Gulf war.

But the second Gulf War under the presidency of Junior Bush earned huge debate as US completely failed to justify the causes of war. Iraq's possibility of seeking weapons of mass destruction and link with al-Qaeda was unfounded, false, fabricated and proved to be blatant lies by Bush and Blair administration.

The controversy also rose with the conduct of war by the US and its allies, its treatment to the Iraqi PW's and dealing with subsequent Iraqi administration including various deals and contracts. Abu Ghrab and Guantanamo brought a lasting damage to America's reputation among the world's more than 1 billion Muslims.

The war in Iraq was a strategic miscalculation and a greatest blow to American power and prestige since Vietnam. The human and moral cost of the war was too large. The US lost 4,485 young American men and women and more than 31,921 were injured. President Barack Obama rightly said, "We've got an enormous investment of blood and treasure in Iraq." Besides millions of Iraqis were killed, wounded and made homeless.

The cost of war was close to \$1 trillion and its consequence in the US economy is now evident. The most obvious fact is that the war with Iraq has exposed the US weaknesses of declining moral values from top to bottom which should be a subject of research by social and political scientist.

The writer is a retired Brigadier General.

The Arab Spring: A year later

PRASANTA KUMAR PRADHAN

IT was on December 17, 2010 when a Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, had set himself ablaze protesting against harassment by the local authorities. The incident soon led to a nation-wide protest in Tunisia, and subsequently engulfed neighbouring Arab countries in parts of West Asia and North Africa. The Arab world has since witnessed a number of remarkable developments, significant among them being the overthrow of four long serving dictators: Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen. The events leading to the overthrow of these leaders were marked by protracted street protests, often leading to casualties and severe injuries among the protesters.

Apart from the dethronement of these despots, other important development that took place were the holding of elections in Tunisia and Egypt, the results of which has raised alarms in several quarters. People have voted in favour of the Islamist parties, preferring them over the liberals and the seculars. In Tunisia, the Ennahda Party, comprising moderate Islamists, has gained the highest number of seats, winning 89 seats in the 217 member assembly. The Tunisian president has appointed Hamadi Jebali, the Ennahda party leader, as the prime minister who will be leading a coalition with the liberal Congress for the Republic and the left-of-centre Ettakatol or Forum Party. Similarly, in Egypt, the results of the first round of elections have shown that the Muslim Brotherhood backed Freedom and Justice Party is gaining the highest number of seats. Though there are two more rounds of voting to go, it is clear from the first round itself that the Islamists are emerging as a major force.

The Gulf rulers, who have been anxiously watching the developments in North Africa the fate of the despots and their regimes, beginning of the electoral process, participation of the people in the affairs of the state among others should be drawing lessons to initiate reforms in their countries as well. It is time the Gulf rulers understood that money alone cannot buy people's loyalty forever. They have maintained welfare systems by using huge amount of oil money to perpetuate their rule and have tried to pacify the protesters by pumping in more money. For them it is important to understand that that in this age of information and globalisation, people have aspirations transcending material-



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istic considerations, which may include participation in the affairs of the state, social and cultural freedom, free speech, free press, etc.

The socio-political environment in the Arab region has become even more sensitive as a result of the role played by the regional and major external powers in manoeuvring the protests to further their interests. Saudi Arabia has emerged as an influential player in the Arab Spring. Initially, Saudi Arabia had given shelter to Ben Ali and had thrown its weight behind Hosni Mubarak. After successfully dealing with protesters in its own territory, Saudi Arabia went on to suppress the protests in neighbouring Bahrain by sending its military. Also, it played a major role in the signing of the GCC initiative led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen. Saudi Arabia was at the forefront of withdrawing diplomats from Damascus which was followed by some other countries of the region.

Turkey also has been making efforts to move closer to its Arab neighbours with the objective of strengthening its role and position in the region. The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, made an 'Arab Spring Tour' to Libya, Tunisia and Egypt in September 2011 trying to position Turkey as a model for these countries.

Iran too has tried to capitalise upon the instability in the Arab streets by often supporting the protesters against the regimes. It is to be noted that the sectarian tension between the Shias and

Sunnis has further increased in the region and the Saudi-Iranian relations have touched a new low. While Iran termed the Saudi Arabian decision to send troops to Bahrain as 'intervention,' Saudi Arabia, in turn, warned Iran to keep away from Arab affairs.

That the developments in the Gulf region were considered strategically and economically more important than North Africa was reflected in the approaches of the major powers and regional organisations towards the protests. The Arab League had initially suspended the membership of Libya, but later restored it in August. The Arab League also suspended Syria's membership and imposed sanctions on it. The Arab League, however, did not take similar actions in case of Bahrain and Yemen. The GCC criticised Gaddafi and Assad for repressions, killings, human rights violation, etc., but took a different approach towards protests in the Gulf region. Similarly, while the big powers at the UNSC differed over ways to deal with countries like Syria and Libya, their response to the protests in the Gulf has been, for the most part, muted.

The Arab countries where people have successfully overthrown the dictatorial regimes now face the daunting task of moving forward with democratic processes, economic development and institution building. And these challenges lay before a new set of elected democratic leaders with virtually no political experience of running a democratic system. The Arab Spring has opened up an opportunity for the people to choose their leaders in a democratic manner; and, at the same time, it has provided new leaders a chance to show their skills and set the future direction for their country.

The Arab Spring is undoubtedly a landmark development in the Arab history. Its full impact on the domestic and the regional politics is still to be seen, and a lot more could be coming in times to come. The Arab Spring serves as a lesson for the regimes who have survived the storm; and, an opportunity for the masses to shape their own destiny. Also, much depends upon the success of the promises made by the new political parties contesting elections and the surviving rulers who have assured their people of social, political and economic reforms.

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India-Russia Summit

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

INDIAN Prime Minister Manmohan Singh arrived Moscow on December 15 on a three-day visit for a bilateral summit with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev as part of the 12th annual Indo-Russian summit. Manmohan Singh met also Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on December 16.

The bilateral summit has already received a major boost after official sources in New Delhi confirmed that a Nerpac-class nuclear submarine leased for 10 years from Russia would be joining the Indian Navy in early 2012. The development came just hours after the PM reached Moscow for the bilateral summit.

The Indian prime minister had, prior to his departure for Moscow, emphasised on the long-standing and historic ties between the two nations and expressed hope of taking the relationship to a new level. "Both countries recognise the significant mutual benefit we derive from working together...Our bilateral relations with Russia are based on mutual trust, friendship and shared interests," the PM had said in a statement. Observing that Prime Minister Putin has played a key role in the development of "our Strategic Partnership, and has been the architect of our contemporary relationship," Dr. Singh, in his statement, said, "I will review with him the progress we have made in our relations since his visit to India in March 2010."

Russian Ambassador to India Alexander Kadakin said after 10 years of 'strategic' ties, the two countries had redefined their relations as a 'special and privileged' diplomatic partnership. He said Russia will be with India 'rain or shine' and "2010 was unprecedented. India was only country that both Russian president and Prime Minister visited in one year. It is Himalayan relations." Referring to the last year's visit of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to India when 'an unprecedented' 33 agreements were signed, he said during this visit, though the number of agreements will be less, the quality of the pacts would be far greater.

During the visit, Dr. Singh discussed to strengthen and expand bilateral cooperation and consolidate coordination on regional and global issues between the two traditional allies.

During the meetings, the two sides discussed their civil nuclear cooperation, in particular the setting up of units III and IV of the Kudankulam nuclear plant in Tamil Nadu with Russian assistance.

The two sides discussed proposals to ramp up their strategic relations and also signed agreements in the fields of defence, health and science technology "Our relations encompass diverse sectors, including nuclear energy, defence, space, science and technology, hydrocarbons, trade and investment and people-to-people exchanges," Dr Singh said. In the sphere of defence, the two sides signed further agreements on joint development



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of the fifth generation fighter aircraft and multirole transport aircraft, apart from discussing the progress of the BrahMos missile programme.

Bilateral trade figured high in the agenda of the summit. It has already witnessed a 15 per cent growth from \$7.46 billion in 2009 to \$8.535 billion in 2010. The two countries, in 2009, decided to target \$20 billion worth of bilateral trade by 2015 with a focus on energy, pharmaceuticals, IT, steel, hydrocarbons, aerospace and agriculture.

Indian prime minister discussed with Medvedev, how to further enhance bilateral consultations in international forums like the United Nations Security Council, G20, BRICS as well as the East Asia Summit which Russia has recently joined. He held in-depth exchange of views with the Russian leadership on the crisis facing the global economy and the political developments in our extended neighbourhood which included the situation in the "Gulf and Afghanistan and the impact of all this on peace and stability in the world."

Indian ties with the Russian Federation are historic, close and uniquely enduring. During the Cold War era, India and Soviet Union was linked through a Friendship Treaty of August 1971, although India professed non-alignment as a component of its foreign policy. These ties are based on a strong national consensus in both countries that has cut across ideologies or political conditions. The bilateral relationship has been re-energised with the declaration of a Strategic Partnership between the two countries during the visit to India in 2000 by the then President Putin.

Carnegie Moscow Center expert Peter Topychkanov notes that, "This year, however, the visit of the prime minister of India was filled with real agreements in the area of military-technical cooperation, including cooperation on the development of a multipurpose transport plane, as well as cooperation in the peaceful use of atomic energy."

The phrase 'strategic partnership' had been diluted and reduced in value in recent times and had become a fashionable usage in diplomatic relations. However, strategic partnership between India and Russia has been path-breakers and unique.

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