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Worst Fears May be Realized In Iraq

By Bonnie Bricker and Adil E. Shamoo, May 25, 2010

In December, 2002, the talk of our holiday gathering was the looming possibility of the invasion of Iraq. The conversation was not just political -- it was personal. For one of us, born in Baghdad, the faces of those back home were imagined and fears for their future gripped like a vise.

But it was not just the immediate future that cast the deepest shadows across their imagined faces. It was the fear that once Saddam fell, US strategy would never allow for a full Iraqi exit. Heated debates over if the invasion would occur ensued at that gathering in 2002, but no one could believe that the fears of continued occupation would ever be realized.

Now, in 2010, a drawdown of troops in the barely organized chaos of Iraq marches

towards benchmark dates. But with the sharply decreased American media coverage of Iraq, much of the news has focused on random bombings around the country and partial coverage of the recent Iraqi elections. How many average Americans are aware that while troop numbers come down, contractor numbers go up? The number of troops in Iraq is supposed to go down by this August to 50,000 but with contractors the number would be 125,000. Can you imagine that candidate Obama would have campaigned on the promise of having 125,000 personnel in Iraq by the end of summer 2010? How many total U.S. personnel would be left by the end of 2011? Is the number by end of 2011 zero as promised, or 50,000 or more? Who is reporting about special operations in Iraq involving troops that are not Iraqi-based, but merely sweep in, do their work, and sweep out again?

In order to understand policy implications, Americans need information about the current status of Iraq, as well as the impact of policies as changes are anticipated. Should we keep large numbers of U.S. troops in Iraq for an extended period to ensure security in Iraq? Should we withdraw as quickly as possible so that Iraqis fully determine the outcome of their country? Is our oil policy good for Iraq or good for America and the West or both? Do policies based on sectarian divisions in Iraq promote fairness -- or rabid sectarianism? These are the kind of questions that many Iraqis are asking and Americans must openly discuss. Democracy in our country and in Iraq depends on information, and with that, open and honest discussions.

Much of the mainstream media coverage of the war in Iraq has focused on the impact on American military personnel. By withdrawing many of the journalists from Iraq, America's mainstream media has turned their backs on Iraqis. With 2.5 million refugees outside the country, 2.0 million displaced in the country, and many of the country's most educated professionals gone for good, Iraqis are determined, hopeful -- but suffering and still in shock. As American policy shifts, Americans need information to debate and deliberate in order to steer a moral and humane course.

Without it, hope is as fleeting today as it was in 2002.

- Tagged as Iraq, Barack Obama, Iraqi refugees, troop withdrawal

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