IRAQ A FAILED IMPERIALIST VENTURE

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By Haroon Siddiqui, The Toronto Star, 2 July 2009

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In time, even that hidden presence will begin to grate on the Iraqis, just as a U.S. military base in Saudi Arabia had spurred Osama bin Laden and others.
Yet this limited troop pullout is being hailed as a triumph. One is reminded of Richard Nixon's 1973 boast of "peace with honour" in Vietnam. The 1973 Paris treaty that led to the U.S. troop withdrawal was a face-saving formula.

In Iraq, too, the U.S. has little choice but to get out.

Not only did the Iraqi invasion and occupation prove the limits of military power, it also exposed how incapable America has become at nation-building. Its postwar incompetence was stunning.

America plunged Iraq into chaos, shattered the infrastructure and destroyed the society, reducing human beings to their basest instincts. They turned on each other and found safety only in family, tribe, clan and sect. Shiites and Sunnis, who had lived together for ages, ethnically cleansed each other's neighbourhoods, which to this day remain separated by barricades, walls and checkpoints.

Having unleashed the forces that put Iraq's three main communities at war with each other, the U.S. toyed with the idea of dividing the country into the Kurdish north, a Sunni centre and a Shiite south, much like the British had divided India in two in 1947.

Having created the chaos, violence and jihadism, the U.S. said, in colonial fashion, it had to stay to curb the chaos, violence and jihadism. Having crippled the state, it had no choice but to prolong the occupation until the natives were ready to govern themselves.

Iraq exhausted America more than the 1917-32 British invasion and occupation sapped the British. It also created killing fields on a vast scale.

Yet Iraqis have been brushed out of the American narrative – Iraq is free of Saddam Hussein, it is democratic, it is stabilized, it is this and it is that.

There's nary a mention of how many Iraqis are dead (between 100,000 and 1.2 million, depending on who's counting), how many maimed (not known), how many displaced (4 million), and how many tortured with Saddam-like methods in Abu Ghraib and elsewhere (not known).

Besides the damage to U.S. credibility, and not just in the Muslim world, the Iraq adventure empowered Iran far more than the U.S. would ever acknowledge.

Finally, the quest for oil may also turn out to be a mirage.

This week, Iraq's oil minister, Hussain al-Shahristani, a U of T graduate, put development rights up for international bidding. No more no-bid contracts for U.S. firms, unlike under the Bush-Cheney domain.

Nor did George W. and Dick get what they wanted out of the Status of Forces Agreement. Passed by the Iraqi parliament last fall, it stipulates that all U.S. troops must be out by Dec. 31, 2011. No U.S. military operation can be carried out without Iraqi consent (a provision Hamid Karzai can only dream of). Iraqi soil cannot be used by the U.S. to launch a war on any neighbour (Iran).

Iraq is the imperial adventure that both Stephen Harper and Michael Ignatieff, one a neo-con hawk and the other a liberal hawk, fully backed. A monumental failure in judgment, their common stance was, and remains, an affront to the collective will of Canadians.

Haroon Siddiqui <hsiddiq@thestar.ca>