



Written by on August 12, 2010

Iraqi General Wants U.S. Troops to Stay Until 2020

Two British newspapers, the Daily Telegraph and the Guardian, quoted in their August 12 editions statements made by Iraqi Lieutenant General Babakir Zebari, who at a defense conference in Baghdad the previous day called on the United States to leave troops in Iraq beyond next year's planned withdrawal. "If I were asked about the withdrawal, I would say to politicians: the U.S. army must stay until the Iraqi army is fully ready in 2020," said Zebari.



"At this point, the withdrawal is going well, because [the Americans] are still here," Zebari told the AFP news agency on August 11.

The *Guardian* quoted a senior U.S. official who told the paper this week that any future military presence in Iraq would be "in the tens, or low hundreds, but will be far short of an occupation force." It also observed that Zebari's comments were at odds with recent statements from U.S. officials, including the commanding general in Iraq, Ray Odierno, who said this week that the Iraqi military is "ready to take over."

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Another item of interest that the *Guardian* reported was: "... support for an ongoing U.S. presence also came last week from an unlikely quarter, Saddam Hussein's former deputy, Tariq Aziz, who told the *Guardian* that President Obama would be 'leaving Iraq to the wolves' if he continued to withdraw troops."

This represented a dramatic reversal on the part of Aziz, perhaps because he is still being held as a prisoner in Camp Cropper in western Baghdad. As a Chaldean Catholic, Aziz had an audience with Pope John Paul II and other Vatican officials on February 14, 2003, a little over a month prior to the invasion of Iraq, where, according to a Vatican statement, he communicated "the wish of the Iraqi government to co-operate with the international community, notably on disarmament."

Aziz surrendered to U.S. forces two months later, on April 24, 2003.

A *New York Times* article published on October 22, 2002 reported:

[Aziz] said that in demanding stringent new terms for the inspections, the United States was not interested in discovering hidden weapons programs, as it claimed, but in seeking a pretext for a new war with Iraq that would allow President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain to pursue their declared aim of "regime change."

"The inspectors will find that all the talk of Iraq stockpiling weapons of mass destruction is simply a lie, and put by Bush and Blair as a pretext for staging a war," Mr. Aziz said.

It is curious as to why Tariq Aziz, who once strongly disputed the Bush administration's stated reasons



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for sending troops to Iraq, is now warning the Obama administration to delay their withdrawal to avoid “leaving Iraq to the wolves.”

These same “wolves” (al-Qaeda-connected insurgents?) obviously did not make much headway when Saddam Hussein was in control. Therefore, removing Saddam from power — an operation that the U.S. government vaguely tied to the “war on terror” launched in response to the 9/11 attacks waged by al-Qaeda, actually served to *strengthen* al-Qaeda’s position in Iraq.

The 9/11 Commission Report prepared at the request of former President Bush and Congress, concluded that there was no credible evidence that Saddam Hussein had assisted al-Qaeda in preparing or executing the 9/11 attacks.

Voice of America News — an agency of the U.S. government — cited White House spokesman Robert Gibbs, who said the United States is on track to end its combat mission in Iraq at the end of the month as planned. Gibbs said President Obama is satisfied that the Iraqi military will be able to take over security operations. Fifty-thousand U.S. troops will remain in Iraq to serve as a transitional force, but Obama has set a goal of removing all U.S. troops in Iraq by the end of 2011.

Omar al-Saleh, a correspondent from the Middle East-based al Jazeera news network reported from Baghdad that Iraqi officials have made contradictory statements about the country’s readiness to take over security from U.S. forces, noting that two days ago, General Ali Ghaidan, the commander of all Iraqi ground forces, told reporters at a news conference that his troops are “100 per cent ready” to take over.

Despite Iraqi pleas for the United States to delay its withdrawal of troops from Iraq, U.S. strategy is now focused on Afghanistan, which would have made more sense back in 2003. There is where the potential for delay in troop pullout is more likely to occur. As we noted in our article of August 11, [“Military Building Case to Delay Afghan Troop Pullout”](#):

U.S. military officials are building a case to reduce the planned withdrawal of some troops from Afghanistan, scheduled to begin next July. [A *New York Times* article of August 11] explained that the case is geared toward countering pressure being exerted on President Obama from within his own party to proceed quickly with the process of winding down the war.

Military officials have asked for more time for counterinsurgency strategies to produce results and turn the war around. “Their argument,” the Times quoted a senior Obama administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, “is that while we’ve been in Afghanistan for 9 years, only in the past 12 months or so have we started doing this right, and we need to give it some time and think about what our *long-term presence* in Afghanistan should look like.” (Emphasis added.)

Nations that maintain a long-term military presence abroad eventually suffer a wide array of resultant problems back home — social, economic, moral, and political. It is time to learn (and apply) some lessons from history.

Photo: In this July 13, file 2010 photo, U.S. Army soldiers from 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division are seen on board a C-17 aircraft at Baghdad International Airport as they begin their journey to the United States: AP Images



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