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U.S. Legacy In Iraq: Torture, Corruption And Civil War

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What is Left behind in Iraq following U.S. troop pullout?

BEIJING: As the U.S. combat forces are leaving Iraq, the situation in the war-torn country remains unclear and analysts begin to worry about the aftermath following U.S. troops' pullout after its presence of seven years and five months.

IRAQ: MORE VIOLENCE?

A fresh wave of coordinated bombings swept across Iraq's major cities on Wednesday as the U.S. troops are leaving the country, some experts said that after more than seven years of military occupation, violence is one of the few U.S. legacies left in Iraq.

"Now the Americans are leaving, the clearest fingerprints they left on Iraq that any Iraqi can perceive are torture, corruption and civil war," Nuri Hadi, an Iraqi political analyst told Xinhua in a recent interview.

Hadi said the United States, bent on regime change in Iraq, was seriously mistaken as it lacks an understanding of the country's history and its national characteristics.

The recent violence in Iraq, to some extent, looks less devastating mainly because the bloodshed peak during 2006 to 2007 was so hellish and notorious, and Iraq has yet a long

way to go to restore people's normal life, he noted, adding the insurgents still have the ability to carry out high-profile attacks in Iraqi cities.

Hadi said the latest wave of deadly bombings on Wednesday in Iraq's major cities, which left 64 people dead and more than 272 wounded, made the U.S. troop withdrawal look more ill-timed. Likewise, the Obama administration's repeated claim that Iraqi security forces can stand on their own feet appeared more untenable.

"With the partial pullout of the U.S. troops at the end of August, the violence in Iraq is widely expected to increase," he said.

"I think the Qaida militants have showed that they reorganized themselves, and during the past few months they proved that they have the ability to launch sporadic deadly and massive attacks in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities," Hadi said. "But I still believe the Iraqi security forces seem to have the capability to fight back."

However, Hadi said: "We have to admit that a large part of the insurgent groups in Iraq are directly or indirectly linked to political parties participating in the political process, then the security will largely depend on whether those parties are willing to find peaceful means to settle their differences and their struggle for power, or they will simply raise their weapons to fight each other."

Meanwhile, he said the so-called democracy brought by the United States doesn't seem welcomed by many Iraqis who believe what is suitable for the United States is not necessarily suitable for Iraq.

"For many people here it is funny if you say that the Americans brought freedom here, the main result of the U.S. troops presence in Iraq is profound divisions, both racial and sectarian, among the Iraqi factions," said Hadi.

NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES: RUSH TO FILL VACUUM?

Besides, Hadi warned that the current power vacuum in Baghdad made the central government lose its influence and control over other parts of the country. Particularly, conflicts may erupt in towns near the border of the semi-autonomous northern Kurdish region disputed between the central government and the Kurds.

Hani Khalaf, former Arab League representative in Iraq, believed that if there were no coordination between Americans and Iraq's neighboring countries on the pullout, it will open the door for ambitions, and these countries will seek greater role in Iraq.

On the role of Arab countries in Iraq, Khalaf said, "Their role could be stronger, if Arabs recognized the new Iraq."

He noted that the Arab countries differed on "post-Saddam's Iraq" and they didn't deal with the new regime, making Iraqis suspicious of their possible role, Khalaf added.

Dr. Mohamed Abdel Salam, head of Regional Security Department at Egypt's Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies said the United States has great fears about the Iran's growing influence in Iraq.

Washington is very uneasy about the close ties between Iraqi Shiites and Tehran, and the U.S. and Israeli governments have even considered possible military strike against Iran, he said.

Adel Suleiman, director of the Cairo-based Center for Future and Strategic Studies, said that the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq has to be cautious amid complex regional situation, as the United States, Israel and other Western countries are divided in their views and issues of Iranian nuclear program and Iranian meddling in Iraq's affairs remains their major concern.

"The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq this way is completely unjustified like the decision of invasion," Suleiman said, adding that Iraqi forces and security troops are not trained well enough to take the situation under their control.

"The Iraqi forces still need five to seven years to restore control over the situation in Iraq," he added.

U.S.: DIFFICULT TO REALIZE STRATEGIC GOALS

For the United States, a stable, friendly Iraq can serve both as a reliable source of oil, as well as a country that can counter the influence of Iran in the Mideast region.

Anthony Cordesman, a defense and security expert with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said such an "end state" is of course wanted by the United States, but it "will take a minimum of another five years, and probably ten."

Cordesman believes that leaving Iraq does not mean the United States is "going home." The six brigades left in Iraq after the drawdown are capable of carrying out combat missions.

Michael O'Hanlon, director of Research in Foreign Policy at the Washington-based Brookings Institution, said: "We are still going to have a lot of capability, and we are still helping to reassure Iraqis that they are moving in a positive direction."

Under President Barack Obama's plan, Washington is going to pull out the remaining 50,000 troops by the end of next year. Cordesman wrote in a commentary this month that this shouldn't signify the end of the Iraqi mission, as the country is "a truly vital national security interest of the United States, and of all its friends and allies."

He said the United States should forge a partnership with Iraq, and provide the country with aid and security assurance with U.S. military presence in the region.

As for the political implications of the drawdown inside the United States, experts agree that the drawdown fulfils a campaign pledge by Obama, but it won't exert much influence in the mid-term elections.

Thomas Mann, a political expert at Brookings Institution, said Obama is "living by his campaign pledge to remove combat troops from Iraq," and the war is "not an issue" in the fall campaigns.

"There's a sense our presence there is diminishing, we are no longer involving in hot combat, so the Democrats are happy that it seems to be drawing to a close there, the Republicans now are not inclined to say 'No, we want to keep more troops in Iraq,' they think we've lived up to our obligations to the Iraqis," he said.