

Despite government handover, U.S. troops to remain

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Although the U.S. appears to have reduced its active role in Iraq by turning over the reins of government on Monday to a hand-picked interim coalition, it still will not be extricated from the war-torn country and is likely to continue facing nagging questions about why U.S.-led forces invaded the country in the first place, military and diplomatic experts say.

"I think it may turn out to be one of the greatest strategic errors of recent generations," says Susan Rice, former assistant secretary of state for African affairs in the Clinton administration. "One-hundred and sixty billion dollars, 130,000 plus troops, over 800 lives lost, all invested in a conflict which is beside the point and not a threat to our national security. That in and of itself is how it's playing out, an extraordinary diversion of attention and resources and lives."

According to the Pentagon, more than 844 U.S. troops have died and more than 5,000 have been wounded in the war and subsequent occupation that began on March 19, 2003. Iraq Body Count, an international group of scholars and re-



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searchers, estimates that between 9,436 and 11,317 Iraqi civilians have been killed as a direct result of the U.S.-led invasion and another 35,000 to 40,000 injured.

Most of the deaths and injuries on both sides came after May 1, 2003 when President Bush declared an end of combat in Iraq.

So far, Congress has approved \$151 billion through this fiscal year, with the total likely to end up closer to \$200 billion by the time all U.S. troops are withdrawn.

Rice, now a senior fellow in foreign policy at the Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institute, says the U.S. has paid a high price for launching a preemptive war.

"It diverted our attention from the absolutely pressing and critical threat we face from al-Qaeda, which had no relationship in any meaningful way to Iraq. And, to me, it has inadvertently generated

even greater hostility towards the United States," she says. "If it turns out to be a rallying factor and a recruiting organ for al-Qaeda, we will simply be facing more and more determined people who want to kill us."

That anger has increased with the release of photos showing U.S. military police mistreating Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison.

A regional newspaper, The Bahrain Tribune, wrote: "Bush seized all of Saddam's properties and inherited everything Saddam had, including his torturing tools and methods."

Another paper, the Hong Kong-based Asian Times wrote, "Once it could not find weapons of mass destruction to justify its invasion of Iraq, the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush claimed that the liberation of Iraqis from the most inhumane rule of a dictator was a

good enough reason for taking military actions against that country. Now reports of the U.S. military's abuse of Iraqi prisoners in that notorious prison threaten to deprive the United States of even that wobbly claim."

Bush is also seeing dwindling poll numbers at home.

"I think that the American people are very sophisticated about this. They hear what they hear, but they believe what they see," says former



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Clinton National Security Adviser Samuel L. Berger. "I think that's one of the reasons why support for the Bush administration policy is declining. What they're hearing and what they're seeing are not the same."

The State Department released a report for 2003 claiming that terrorism is on the decline. However, on June 10, 2004, it was forced to correct its assessment and in doing so, disclosed that acts

of international terrorism is a greater threat today than it was before the war in Iraq. The Department acknowledged 625 terror-related incidents instead of the 307 it had initially reported.

On Monday, two days earlier than expected, the Bush administration transferred what President Bush described as "full and complete sovereignty" to an unelected interim government in Iraq. The transfer comes approxi-

mately 15 months after the war began and 14 months after the fall of its capital, Baghdad, on April 9, 2003.

"This interim government will assume full sovereignty and will oversee all ministries and all functions of the Iraqi state. Those ministries will report to Prime Minister [Iyad] Allawi, who will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of Iraq's interim government," Bush said earlier this month.

He outlined a five-step plan for successful sovereignty:

First, hand over authority to a sovereign Iraqi government; second, help tighten security; third, continue rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure; fourth, encourage more international support and fifth, move toward a national election that will bring forward new leaders empowered by the Iraqi people.

Edwin Dorn, a former under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness, says the Bush administration has a difficult job ahead.

"I don't know that they have figured out how they're going to untangle themselves," says Dorn, now dean of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. "Next January, there is supposed to be elections in Iraq. That's supposed to produce a permanent government. There does not, at this point, seem to be a basis for holding elections. That is, nobody has house-to-house census data sufficient to hold an election. To hold an election, you have to have registered voters. You have to know who lives where in order to ensure against fraud. Those kinds of national census data do not exist. So, it's going to be very difficult for the interim Iraqi government six months from now when they're supposed to hold national elections."

Meanwhile, military personnel that had been scheduled to be released from active duty are being retained, whether they want to be or not, and citizens that had been serving on weekends in the National Guard are being mobilized for full-time active duty. National Guard units make up almost one-third of the U.S. Army troops now in Iraq.

One of those guardsmen, Specialist Corey Duppins, returned to Washington, D.C. this spring after spending a year in Iraq.

"That makes you kind of wonder what was our objective for going over there in the first place if we didn't find anything," says Duppins who served with the 547th Transportation Company. "I'm not going to talk down our president by me being in the military, but my personal opinion is you hear one thing; then all of a sudden it's another. It becomes confusing. First it was weapons of mass destruction; then it was to

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CAAN

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Baptist Church, 500 W. Monroe Ave., and included candidates for congress, state senate, county commission and state assembly. The forum started at 8 a.m. and ended about 4 p.m. "Today went well," said the Rev. Dr. Robert Fowler, president of CAAN and Victory's pastor. "There are several things to keep in mind. This is a new organization. Forty-plus people speaks well that it was a long day. This is a positive note in the intentions of our organization."

"This gives us the opportunity to hold these candidates accountable," Fowler said.

On July 17, the Candidates Forum will include the commission seat held by Yvonne Atkinson Gates and several assembly district seats. The forum will shift to judicial and board of education candidates on Aug. 7, said Cordell Stokes, CAAN spokesperson. Those forums will also be held at Victory.

Saturday, each candidate appeared individually and was given 3 minutes for an opening statement, then responded to questions from the public written on index cards, with 1 minute for closing remarks. As many as 40 participated in casting secret ballots.

Democrat Tom Gallagher, who detailed a long list of accomplishments working with Black communities in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, received a CAAN endorsement for Congressional District 3. He was acknowledged as having helped the Urban Chamber of Commerce secure funding for its planned \$3.1-million, multi-use business incubator and service center.

Democrat Valerie Wiener was endorsed to keep her State Senate 3 seat. Steven Horsford, vying to fill the State Senate 4 seat held for 30 years by Joe Neal, received a CAAN endorsement. Democrats Richard Fitzgerald, Senate 5, Bob Beers, Senate 6 and incumbent Dina Titus, Senate

7, were endorsed, as was Republican Danny Tarkanian in Senate 11.

Democrat Vonne S. Chowning, who served 14 years in the state legislature, was endorsed for County Commission B over Mary Kincaid-Chauncey, an incumbent Democrat. The two-term commissioner was indicted last November on charges of wire fraud, conspiracy to commit wire fraud and extortion.

"I didn't resign because I know I'm innocent," Kincaid-Chauncey said. "I have been accused of something and I have not been convicted. I thought about not running. My attorney thinks it's (indictment) politically motivated. I'm going to stand up and fight it. I can't talk about it in detail."

Republican Bill Krane, who is challenging incumbent Chip Maxfield for Commission C, appeared to win favor after passing out a photo of his family which includes an adopted son from Tanzania.

Krane lambasted Maxfield for having \$440,000 in campaign contributions.

"Why does he need that kind of money for a job that pays \$50,000 a year?" Krane asked.

Surprisingly, no one questioned Maxfield about his hefty campaign chest. Instead, someone asked, "Bill Krane seems to be a nice guy. Would you consider stepping aside to let a nice guy run?"

The question appeared to catch Maxfield off guard. "I will continue to serve as long as I am effective in representing the people," he said.

The candidates forum, where 25 appeared and letters were read for four, was part of a process for CAAN. Approximately 15 candidates did not show.

"The candidates we endorse, we are going to participate in every facet of their campaigns, including fund raising and going to the polls," Fowler said.

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