

Operation New Dawn: withdrawal of American troops from Iraq

By Abbey Brinkey
STAFF WRITER

Seven years ago, the U.S. presence in Iraq was known as Operation Iraqi Freedom. Now, beginning on Sept. 1, it will be known as Operation New Dawn.

"By August 31, 2010 our combat mission in Iraq will end," President Barack Obama said in a speech on Feb. 27, 2009, as American troops began withdrawing from Iraq. This does not mean, however, that American troops have seen the last of combat; only that their mission has taken a new direction.

According to CNN, on Aug. 24, there were fewer than 50,000 troops in Iraq, the lowest since 2003. The troops remaining will take on the tasks of advising, assisting, training, and equipping the Iraqi forces.

Despite the recent string of bombings and threats of attacks in Iraq, American troops will not sway from their latest objective of preparing local forces; BBC has reported that the troops will be armed, but their weapons will be put to use only for purposes of self-defense or at the request of the Iraqi government.

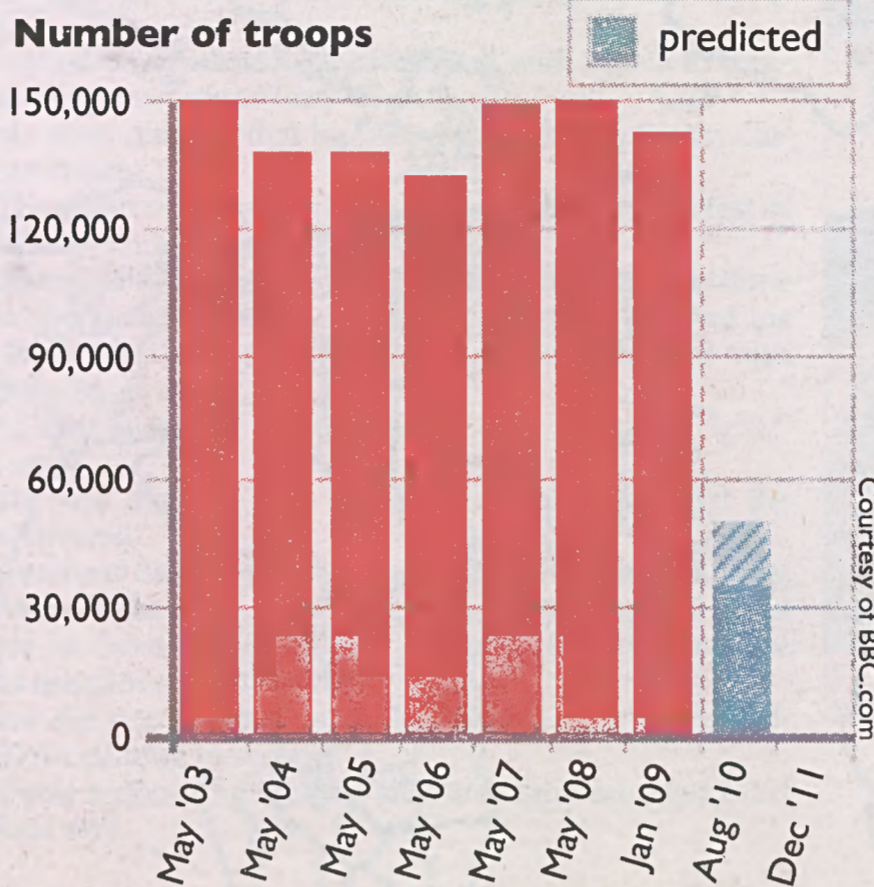
There is some hesitation about the complete withdrawal of the troops, due to the uncertainty of the political situation in Iraq. Regardless of the March parliamentary elections, Iraqi government remains unstable. Iraqi commander, Lt. Gen. Babak

er Zebari is among those who are hesitant.

"The problem will start after 2011 ... the politicians must find other ways to fill the void after 2011," said Zebari, according to BBC. "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.'"

Due to the unstable political situation, many seem to believe that a civil war in Iraq is inevitable. These beliefs have led to the concern with how Iraq could deal with such turmoil.

"Right now I am concerned that by December 2011 ... the Iraqi political process will not be stable or mature enough to handle a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops," said Ken Pollack, a former CIA analyst and Clinton administration official, voicing his



unease to BBC.

Despite concerns and speculation, Operation New Dawn aims to have the residual troops out of Iraq by Dec. 31, 2011. The next 15 months will pass slowly for the families of those who remain in Iraq, but their homecoming will be marked in the pages of history.

Mexico's drug war escalates

By Zachary Lynn
STAFF WRITER

On Aug. 22 the decapitated bodies of four men were hung by their feet from a bridge in Cuernavaca, Mexico early Sunday morning, according to the Associated Press.

The recent killings are believed to be the result of a rivalry that has developed within the Beltran Leyva Cartel.

According to Reuters, the Cartel split into two rival factions in December when its leader, Arturo Beltran Leyva, was killed in a gun battle with Mexican security forces. Hector Beltran Leyva, the brother of the deceased leader of the cartel, leads one of the factions, while American-born Kingpin Edgar Valdes Villarreal leads the other.

The message left with the bodies indicated that the Hector Leyva faction initiated the killings. According to the Cuernavaca Police, the message stated, "this is what will happen to all those who support the traitor Edgar Valdez Villarreal."

The now deceased men had been kidnapped several days previously, with the abduction reported to the police.

Cuernavaca, Mexico, has been the site of the most recent outbreak of violence in the escalation of hostilities between the drug cartels and the Mexican government's forces.

Northern and Western areas of Mexico remain partially paralyzed by violence, with the regional economy being greatly affected by the ongoing cartel violence. According to a press statement, in early August, Governor Eugenio Hernandez of the state of Tamaulipas, urged President Felipe Calderon to transfer high risk prisoners out of the region, indicating concerns that even the prison system may not be sufficiently secure.

Most of the escalation in cartel violence has occurred since President Fillipe Calderon took office in December of 2006, and deployed government police and military forces to combat cartel strongholds in Sinaloa, Tijuana, Guerrero, and Tamulpias. Since the crackdown began, over 28,000 people have been killed in related incidents, the U.S. State Department reported.

"Cartel-driven violence has moved southward to Mexico's business capital, Monterrey, forming a 'northeastern triangle' of violence among Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo and Monterrey," said U.S. Ambassador Carlos Pascual.

Assistant Professor of History and Latin American Studies, Alvis Dunn, elaborated on the possible further consequences of the increasing violence in Northern Mexico.

"The threat is that the border areas in particular might become lawless zones, or worse still, zones controlled by warlords," said Dunn. "A flow of refugees, not seeking work but seeking sanctuary from violence, might become the norm."

Dunn continued to indicate the other consequences of the increasing violence in the border regions, suggesting that they may expand beyond potential humanitarian crisis to jeopardize the general stability of Mexico and Central America.

With the violence across Northern Mexico steadily rising, it remains to be seen what can, and will be done about the crisis.

FLOODS

Pakistan flooding forces thousands from homes; more rain expected

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under water. The floods have affected 20 million people, 200,000 people have been evacuated, and 1.2 million homes have been destroyed, according to the BBC.

Health epidemics have now also surfaced as a serious concern, as well. With dry shelter unavailable for much of the population, water-borne diseases have emerged. 1.6 million people have been affected by disease and 3.5 million children are at risk, according to National Public Radio. Almost 100,000 people require treatment for cholera, diarrhea, dysentery, skin infections, and malaria daily. These diseases are exhausting an already strained infrastructure.

"In terms of environmental damage, where there are industries that are affected, there can be significant releases of hazardous or toxic materials which can be distributed over wide areas," Dobson said.

"Sewage and water treatment systems can be destroyed or require extensive repairs."

Pakistan's infrastructure is crumbling. According to CNN, the floods have affected more people than the Haiti earthquake, Indian Ocean tsunami, and 2005 Pakistan earthquake combined. The New York Times reported that the floods have destroyed more than 5,000 miles of roads and railways, 7,000 schools, and more than 400 hospitals. Critical bridges have been washed away, taking with them any hope of a speedy rescue.

In many areas of Pakistan, people are marooned to trees, roofs, and various floating debris. Stranded for days, people are fighting the water, disease, and malnutrition. Even in areas able to receive aid, the sense of desperation is indisputable. Reports of looting and protests over food are adding to the chaos, according to The New York Times.

Over 30 countries have

pledged \$700 million. The United States alone has contributed more than \$70 million according to USA Today. However, rebuilding what has been lost may cost billions of dollars.

Before the worst natural disaster in Pakistan's history occurred, the United States pledged to spend \$7.5 billion in development over the next five years. Money that was supposed to be spent on schools, hospitals, electricity and more will now be mostly spent rebuilding what the flood swept away.

Even with the \$700 million dollar pledge, desperation still overwhelms most of the country. Because roads and bridges have been swept away, many can only be rescued by air. Helicopter rescues are performed daily, but it is not enough. According to CNN, 8,000-10,000 people live and sleep in the mud in the city of Sukkur.

"I don't think Pakistan will ever fully recover, but we will

move on," President Asif Ali Zardari said to BBC news. The president also mentioned that preventative measures will be taken to protect Pakistan from future devastating forces.

Such preventative measures will be vital for Pakistan's future, according to Dobson.

"Events like the severe rainfall that caused this flooding are likely to become more frequent in coming decades due to global warming," Dobson said. "We've already seen trends toward increased precipitation around the world."

With still more rain in the forecast, the spread of disease and the threat of more dams bursting in the south, Pakistan's future is uncertain. However, Zardari urged his citizens to celebrate their independence day by reaching out to victims and their families.

"Do not lose hope," said Zardari "The entire nation stands with you."