



AFTER THE WAR, A BATTLE STILL RAGES FOR PEACE IN IRAQ

August 29, 2003

Four months after major combat operations ended in the Iraq War, U.S. soldiers and their international allies still face major challenges in their efforts to bring peace, stability and a new infrastructure to the former totalitarian nation.

On Friday, a bombing at the Imam Ali mosque in the holy Iraqi city of Najaf killed 75 people, including one of Iraq's most prominent religious leaders and a supporter of U.S.-led efforts for peace.

Friday's bombing, along with the Aug. 19 bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, which killed 24 humanitarian aid workers, has led to an increased feeling of insecurity among Iraqi citizens.

Ongoing unrest

While 22,000 troops from 30 nations are on duty in the country, terrorist activity and ongoing guerilla-style attacks have made it difficult for them to maintain peace as well as rebuild schools, energy and water systems, and begin exporting oil, Iraq's most profitable industry.

One strategy of anti-U.S. groups is to sabotage the rebuilding process so that Iraqis will become frustrated and turn against the coalition forces.

Last month, a series of attacks on oil pipelines led to fuel shortages in the country. The same weekend, looters destroyed electricity cables, which led to power failures. A similar attack on Baghdad's water supply left 300,000 people without water.

The attacks also have had major implications for Iraq's economy and for aid agencies' ability to help its people. Following the United Nations bombing, the organization pulled a majority of its Iraq staff, many of them charged with bringing food and other aid to Iraqis.

U.S. and Iraqi officials believe the attacks – which have killed 65 U.S. soldiers since the war officially ended May 1 – have been carried out by those loyal to ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

“This outrage is designed to create the maximum damage to the people in Iraq, to create sectarian violence and sectarian strife,” Ahmed Chalabi, leader of the Iraqi National Congress, said Friday after the mosque bombing. “It is the work of Saddam.”

Some countries have blamed the upheaval on America's refusal to share control of Iraq.

While Secretary of State Colin Powell has asked for help from outside nations, he has also said the United States would not relinquish political or military leadership of Iraq to any other nation. Several countries, including France and Russia, have refused to send troops or money to help until the United States turns over political control to the United Nations. So far, the United Nations has played only a humanitarian role in Iraq.

On Thursday, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said the United States might consider allowing a U.N.-led peacekeeping force to enter Iraq but would still maintain command of that force.

Meanwhile, the search for weapons of mass destruction continues. Earlier this year, President Bush listed Saddam Hussein's possession of those deadly weapons as a major reason for war.

The issue has become a sore point among anti-war critics and politicians. A congressional committee is currently conducting hearings about the weapons hunt and whether President Bush may have overstated the threat to national security.

Coalition successes

Despite the many obstacles facing coalition forces in Iraq, there has been some progress. The U.S. Administrator in Iraq Paul Bremer has asked for patience from the Iraqi people as the troops continue their work on security, the economy and the political transition.

According to Bremer, all of Iraq's universities have reopened, 90 percent of schools have completed the school year, 100 percent of health clinics are serving patients and 75 percent of the country's electric power is running as it was before the war. Bremer also said that 50 percent of the desired police force is patrolling the streets and that U.S. soldiers are training a new Iraqi army.

Troops have also killed or captured 39 of the 55 most wanted members of Saddam's former regime – including his two sons Uday and Qusay Hussein – and have installed an Iraq Governing Council, made up of 25 temporary leaders from various Iraqi ethnic groups.

The estimated monthly cost of keeping U.S. troops in Iraq is about \$2 billion. The commander of those troops Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez said he expects troops to be there for two more years.

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