

Is Iraq War End a New Day?

Exclusive: The departure of the last 500 U.S. combat troops from Iraq in the predawn hours on Sunday marked an anti-climatic end to a near-nine-year war that began with “shock and awe” and “embedded” journalists joining the invasion force. But Robert Parry wonders if any lessons were learned – and what lies ahead.

By Robert Parry

Under the cover of darkness early Sunday morning, the last 500 U.S. combat troops sped out of Iraq in a 110-vehicle convoy to Kuwait, a departure kept secret even from Iraqi allies to avoid possible leaks to militants who might have inflicted one more ambush.

It was an ignominious end to an imperial adventure that cost around \$1 trillion and left nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers dead, along with uncounted hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, not to mention many thousands more injured and maimed.

Iraq’s infrastructure also remains devastated by the war, and there is the strong possibility that sectarian tensions will again erupt into violence. With a new round of political arrests just this weekend, many Iraqis fear they may have traded one dictator, secular Sunni Saddam Hussein, for another tyrant, Shiite Nouri al-Maliki, today’s strongman prime minister.

The United States will try to extend its influence and get some “value” for its massive investment but without tens of thousands of troops to deploy and without tens of billions of dollars to throw around, it is hard to envision how that will work. The arc of American power is clearly on the decline.

Most of the Iraqis quoted by the New York Times on Monday expressed relief that the American troops had finally left.

“We’ve been wanting this day since 2003,” said Moustafa Younis, an auto mechanic in Mosul. “When they invaded us, we carried our machine guns and went out to fight them. We decided to do suicide operations against them. They committed many crimes, and we lost a lot of things because of them.”

Indeed, the U.S. departure represents a hard-fought victory for the Iraqi resistance, including anti-American Shiite leader Moktada al-Sadr whose political influence with the Maliki government was a key factor in Maliki’s rejection of American requests to leave behind a “residual” military force.

Strategically, Shiite-ruled Iran, which has close ties to both Maliki and Sadr,

seems to have gained the most from the U.S. toppling of Iran's longtime nemesis, Saddam Hussein. Iran also worked behind the scenes to pressure Maliki into rejecting long-term U.S. bases that could be used to threaten Iran.

The impact of the war domestically is also unclear. Without doubt, the war's costs contributed to the vast U.S. budget deficit, which has spurred activism from both sides of the political spectrum. The right-wing Tea Party demands austerity at home, while Occupy Wall Street protesters push back against policies that favor military contractors and the rich. But which argument will prevail is uncertain.

Another consequence of the Iraq War and its WMD falsehoods has been a deeper public skepticism toward whatever the government says. Today, some on the Left don't even believe that the war is really over, seeing the withdrawal as just a P.R. subterfuge.

Neocon Comeback?

However, as much as some things have changed, others remain the same. The neoconservatives, who dreamt up the war, still have not given up their dream of exploiting America's advanced military technology to reshape the Middle East and eliminate Muslim governments that are deemed a threat to U.S. or Israeli interests.

The neocons, who remain very influential at Official Washington's leading think tanks and best-read op-ed pages, admit that mistakes were made early on in the war and that their cheery vision of happy Iraqis throwing flowers and candy at the U.S. invaders was a tad over-optimistic.

But the neocons are pushing the theme that their "successful surge" in 2007 "won" the war before President Barack Obama threw away their "victory" for political reasons.

However, the evidence actually points to the "surge," which cost nearly 1,000 U.S. lives, as a minor factor in the gradual decline in Iraqi violence. More important developments were the payoffs to Sunni militants in 2006 before the "surge" and back-channel deals between Maliki and Sadr to get Shiite militias to stand down in exchange for a U.S. withdrawal timetable.

It was President George W. Bush's grudging acceptance of a timetable that committed U.S. troops to leave by a fixed date, the end of 2011, that appears to have been the greatest single explanation for the drop-off in attacks against U.S. military personnel. However, Official Washington largely bought the neocon myth that the "surge" did it.

Among the American people, it seems most are inclined to put the disastrous near-nine-year war out of mind and to focus on the Christmas holidays. However, there are sure to be recriminations among Washington's chattering class during Campaign 2012.

Indeed, given the U.S. news media's failure to have learned lasting lessons from getting snookered in 2002-2003 over Bush's false WMD claims, it is very possible that the neocons will ride back into power behind a new Republican president in 2013, with a renewed determination to start a new Middle East war, this time against Iran.

It's also possible that Obama could be mouse-trapped into an Israeli-instigated war against Iran, especially if Israel decides to strike Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program before Election 2012. Obama may see little choice but to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Israel.

It should be remembered that the last two U.S. presidents who got themselves on Israel's bad side, Democrat Jimmy Carter in 1980 and Republican George H.W. Bush in 1988, went down to electoral defeat.

Many of the leading Republican presidential contenders sense this political opportunity to drive a wedge between pro-Israel Jewish voters and Democrats. That helps explain the current GOP competition for taking the toughest pro-Israeli positions (although it is also a pander to many Christian fundamentalists).

The stance of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich calling the Palestinians an "invented people" and dismissing them as "terrorists" is even more extreme than the positions of Israel's Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Indeed, Gingrich seems to be laying the groundwork for ethnically cleansing the West Bank of Palestinians.

Gingrich also made clear that he thinks simply bombing Iran's nuclear sites isn't enough, that a joint U.S.-Israeli invasion to force "regime change" is the only way to go. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Will Iraq Debacle Prevent Iran War?"](#)]

So, it is possible maybe even likely that the American military withdrawal from Iraq will represent only a respite before a new round of fear-mongering, word-twisting and chest-thumping leads the United States into another Middle East war.

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry's *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege and Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

A Black/Indian Victory for Freedom

History, as we receive it, is usually the narrative of the victors over the vanquished what those in power want us to think. But the truth can sometimes be ascertained, as William Loren Katz demonstrates in this story of resistance by an alliance of Africans and Native Americans against the U.S. military.

By William Loren Katz

Christmas Eve marks the anniversary of one of the least known battles for freedom and self-determination fought in North America. In 1837, in what had become the state of Florida less than a generation earlier, the freedom fighters were members of the Seminole Nation, an alliance of African slave runaways and Native American Seminoles.

They faced the strongest power in the Americas, the combined armed forces of the United States Army, Navy and Marines, whose goal was to crush the bi-racial alliance and return its African-American members to slavery.

The battle lines were drawn where they were, in part, because an early expedition by Ponce De Leon had claimed the Florida peninsula for the Spanish monarchy but Spain lacked the means to govern the large territory.

So, during the colonial era, escaped slaves from the Carolinas built a new home in ungoverned Florida. Since 1738, Africans had been establishing prosperous, self-governing communities, and around 1776, they welcomed Seminoles fleeing ethnic persecution by the Creek Nation.

The Africans taught their new friends the methods of rice cultivation they had learned in Sierra Leone and Senegambia. On this basis the two peoples of color built an agricultural-based society with a military force prepared to meet threats to their community, to their right of self-determination and to their liberty.

By the War of 1812, the Florida alliance was facing repeated attacks from American slave-hunter posses. There was also an occupation by an armed white militia force known as "Patriots," who since 1811 enjoyed covert support from President James Madison. He hoped the Patriots would seize Florida for the United States.

Driving this campaign against Florida's African and Seminole inhabitants were U.S. slaveholders who saw this successful bi-racial alliance as a clear and present danger to their southern plantation system. They had a point, since each week runaways crossed the border to find freedom in Seminole villages.

During one U.S. invasion in 1816, Army Lt. Col. Duncan Clinch, reported: "The American negroes had principally settled along the Apalachicola river and a number of them had left their fields and gone over to the Seminoles on hearing of our approach. Their corn fields extended nearly fifty miles up the river and their numbers were daily increasing."

In 1819, repeated invasions from the growing giant to the North persuaded Spain to sell Florida to the United States, leading to a 41-year-challenged U.S. occupation known as the "Three Seminoles Wars."

In 1837, the best-informed U.S. officer in the field, Major General Sidney Thomas Jesup, reported: "Throughout my operations I have found the negroes the most active and determined warriors; and during conferences with the Indian chiefs I ascertained they exercised an almost controlling influence over them."

Citing the dangers his men faced, he said, "The two races, the negro and the Indian, are rapidly approximating; they are identical in interests and feelings. Should the Indians remain in this territory the negroes among them will form a rallying point for runaway negroes from the adjacent states; and if they remove, the fastness of the country will be immediately occupied by negroes."

U.S. forces destroyed crops, cattle and horses, violated agreements, and seized women and children as hostages, but the Seminole alliance, even as they protected their families and homes, ran circles around the technologically and numerically superior invaders. U.S. tactics aimed at racially dividing the Africans and Seminoles also failed.

The day before Christmas 1837, U.S. Colonel Zachary Taylor, determined to defeat his wily foe, marshaled more than 1,000 troops in pursuit of about 400 Seminoles under the command of Wild Cat and his sub-chief, African Seminole John Horse.

As Taylor's 180 Missouri riflemen, 800 soldiers from the U.S. Sixth, Fourth, and First Infantry Regiments and 70 Delaware (Native American) scouts approached, Seminole commanders positioned their marksmen in trees and tall grass in the

northeast corner of Florida's Lake Okeechobee.

The Delaware, sensing danger, hesitated, and then fled. Next, the Missourians broke and ran. Taylor ordered his regular Army forward, and later had to report that pinpoint Seminole rifle fire had brought down "every officer, with one exception, as well as most of the non-commissioned officers" and left "but four untouched."

On Christmas morning, Taylor found the Seminoles had fled in canoes. He counted 26 U.S. dead and 112 wounded, found less than half a dozen slain Seminoles and captured no prisoners.

This battle took place during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), which involved U.S. Naval and Marine units, at times half of the Army, and cost 1,500 military deaths and U.S. taxpayers \$30 million [pre-Civil War dollars].

After his decimated army limped back to Fort Gardner, Zachary Taylor won promotion by claiming, "the Indians were driven in every direction." Later, using his reputation as an "Indian fighter," Taylor won election as the 12th President of the United States.

The Seminole alliance at Lake Okeechobee delivered the Army's worst defeat in decades of Florida warfare. However truth about the battle and the three wars long remain buried, hidden or distorted.

For example, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. in *The Almanac of American History*, wrote of Taylor defeat: "Fighting in the Second Seminole War, General Zachary Taylor defeats a group of Seminoles at Okeechobee Swamp, Florida." Not exactly.

The Seminoles conducted a sustained and heroic resistance to the new American Republic's first foreign invasion of foreign soil, and created one of liberty's proudest moments on the North American continent. We who cherish the long fight in our country for independence and freedom deserve to know this story.

William Loren Katz is the author of *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*, from which this essay was adapted. A newly revised edition is to be published in early 2012. The author of 40 history books, Katz has been affiliated with New York University since 1973, and his website is WILLIAMLKATZ.COM.
