

Is Iraq ready to go it alone?

The recent massive car bombing that left more than 100 dead in central Baghdad, along with the fractious political debate over the country's coming elections, has raised serious doubts over whether the country will be able to handle its own affairs once American forces complete their scheduled pullout.

These recent events have also put a serious dent in Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's effort to portray himself as a strong leader capable of securing and unifying Iraq.



On Dec. 8, five car bombs detonated near government offices in Baghdad, killing more than 120 people and injuring 500. The attack came only a day after the Iraqi parliament concluded months of convoluted debate with an 11th-hour deal paving the way for elections to be held in March.

While the Obama administration says it is still committed to removing the bulk of U.S. combat troops from Iraq by mid-2010, some observers here look at the twin events as proof that America's presence will be necessary for years to come.

They note that the agreement on a new election law was possible only after intense U.S. diplomatic pressure. And they add that the bombing, which the prime minister appeared to blame at least in part on disloyal security forces, proves that Iraq's security forces are still ill-prepared to defend the country.

"The American role is necessary now in Iraq, not only to maintain security, but to maintain political stability," said Hameed Fadhel, a political sciences professor at Baghdad University. "The Iraqi people no longer trust their politicians." He added that ridding the security forces of insurgent collaborators was "a difficult, long-term task" that would require political consensus. "Maliki cannot carry out that mission alone," he said.

Abdullah Jafar, a retired professor of political sciences, said the debate over the election law showed the public that Americans continue to play a vital role in framing the country's political structure.

"People read in the news that the American president or envoy had urged Iraqi politicians to approve the election law, to get out of the bottleneck," he said. "Iraqi politicians have shown people they cannot run this country alone."

Andy Laine, a U.S. State Department spokesman in Baghdad, was quick to distance American officials from any role in the final agreement.

"Credit for the passage of the revised election law goes to the Iraqis," he said. "The United States offered advice and encouragement, but it was the Iraqis that made the difficult decisions." As for extending America's military presence in the country, some say U.S. forces still have an important role to play.

Sadi Pira, a politburo member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the two dominant Kurdish parties, said that the latest bombings in Baghdad, along with unrest in Mosul and Kirkuk, "proves that the Iraqi forces are not able to control the cities or the borders."

"If the U.S. position is to extend the (stay) of the remaining coalition forces, it is not bad for Iraq," he said.

Adel Abdul-Karim, an unemployed man in the largely Shia city of Basra, said he believed rising violence in the run-up to the elections would delay the American withdrawal.

"I expect more problems, and I can't rule out the return of sectarian violence," he said.

Of course, there are still many here for whom the U.S. presence can't end fast enough.

Nasser al-Rubaia, a legislator allied to the anti-American Shia cleric, Moqtada al-Sadr, said the U.S. should play no role either in the country's politics or security.

"The American forces are the reason behind the bombs," he said. "It is not true that security will get worse if they pull back. We have tried their presence; we have not tested their absence, so we cannot judge it." And ultimately, conditions on the ground in Iraq may be only a minor factor in whether the United States remains deeply engaged beyond the end of 2011, when Washington is committed to the withdrawal of almost all its forces. Domestic considerations inside America may make any other alternative impossible.

(Source: thesunnews.com)

Remembering Gaza one year on

By Peter Eyre

December the 27th 2008 is a day that changed my life dramatically. The Israeli attack on Gaza not only caused me much sadness but also inspired me to become an independent activist and columnist not only against these terrible atrocities but also against all wars.

I watched the White Phosphorus (WP) rain down on Gaza and realized that this was not going to be an easy time for the people living in the strip. The sheer size of the attack from land, sea and air gave a clear indication that this was going to be a massive and aggressive disproportionate attack.

When the bombs, shells and missiles started hitting what appeared to be random targets in Gaza it became clear to me that these weapons were not just conventional weapons but rather showing clear signs of mini thermonuclear explosions and other types of "Dirty Weapons".

It was during one such attack that I saw a direct hit on a building and when I played it back, frame by frame, I noticed that this particular weapon was a bunker buster. Needless to say little remained of the building after the dense black smoke had cleared.

As time went on I became even more saddened as daily pictures emerged of the ever rising death toll. It hurt deep inside to see so many dead women and children arriving at the hospital and others with such terrible injuries. It was also around this time that it became clear to me that even those that had survived the initial injuries would eventually succumb to the same fate by the fragments in their bodies or from the DU/EU particles in and around the region.

Many times we saw WP going off in multiple attacks over densely populated districts of Gaza City. Sometimes entire districts lay under a dense white cloud of this putrid toxic substance with many more going off overhead. I again realized that beneath this dense cloud were many homes and I could imagine how difficult it would have been to breathe. For babies and young children the use of WP would cause them terrible suffering.

It is broadly known that the use of WP is totally indiscriminate as the shells can burst at any height and angle. If anyone is out in the street when these shells go off it is almost impossible to avoid contact with the bomblets that rain down from the explosions. Sometime they detonate close to the ground and at different angles and then the consequences are beyond description.

WP upon contact with the skin burns fiercely and will burn through to the bone. Sometimes this terrible wound can congeal over and stop burning until such times as the surgeon goes in again to clear out the wound and the WP will again re ignite. In some areas of war it is known for this to happen when bodies are removed from storage and come into contact again with oxygen.....so is the terrible characteristics of WP. From a child's perspective just breathing this chemical is enough for their little underdeveloped lungs to fail to cope with this toxic substance.

There were other terrible weapons that the IDF used during its onslaught on this densely populated enclave. Flachette weapons, when they explode, sends out small darts that can penetrate a concrete wall. One doesn't need much imagination as to how much damage these many thousands of darts can cause on such a dense population.

We then have DIME bombs which when they explode do not cause collateral damage to buildings so much but are more focused on a specific target, however these have now proven to be much worse than first anticipated...when they explode they fragment and these particles are like high speed diamond tipped saws. They have the ability to not only strip flesh but also to cut through limbs with such force.

Eventually we come down to the Smart Bombs, Bunker Busters, JDAM's and an array of missiles such as the "Hellfire Missile" (the name describes its capability) and we start to see that the Gaza Strip suddenly became a testing ground for a vast array of both old and new weapons. Some of these weapons were considered to be what they call 4th generation weapons and



Israeli "smoke screen and illumination via white phosphorus in crowded civilian areas."

certainly many of those used would come under the category of "Dirty Weapons" and are totally illegal. Most were shipped from the U.S. whilst others are manufactured in Israel by IMI. Finally we saw the use of many weapons that contained uranium components that really leaves one feeling extremely sick in the stomach knowing the consequences on the people of Gaza and its environment.

The highly radioactive fragments, particles and aerosols from these weapons would have become embedded in wounds, spread particles in the target area and aerosols would then have drifted around the area, region and the world within days. These nanoparticles cause long term contamination resulting in many forms of cancers, diabetes, infertility, mental health, still births and terrible disfigurements of new born babies etc.

When we add to this the fact that the half life of depleted uranium for instance is 4.5 billion years we see a very clear picture emerging on the long term effect to world's health and its environment. The other terrible tragedy that frequently occurs is that of secondary contamination when the nanoparticles (aerosols) are whisked up by wind, sandstorms or helicopter down wash to start the whole cycle over again.

In the case of Gaza we saw the War Crimes Team arrive (badly prepared) to carry out an assessment of the situation. The teams report reflected on some of the war crimes but brushed aside the Flachette, DIME and DU weapons that were used. In actual fact that although Israel and their Pro Israeli Lobby Group in the U.S. and around world condemned the report it was in actual fact letting them off the hook in a big way and fell short of the genocidal elements that existed in the use of such "Dirty Weapons".

To add insult to injury we then had the UN push through some sort of clearing project (not decontamination) via the UNEP/UNDP. We now have a major project underway in the Gaza Strip which is to bulldoze and clear all bombed out locations, truck the products to a crushing mill. At this location a vast stockpile will be made and then trucked around the strip to re surface the roads and streets of Gaza.

This act alone is a disaster on a huge scale that will last for around one year. Basically it means that all the craters etc will be covered over (evidence hidden) and that this highly contaminated rubble will be pulverized and become a very dangerous source of contamination for a very long time.

This secondary contamination will allow radioactive aerosols to become airborne on the wind (time and time again) around Gaza and drift over to Israel, West Bank, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the entire Middle East and the rest of the world.

It was in total shock to learn that the UN had authorized this type of work which is in violation of the UN's own code of practice as far a radioactive waste is concerned. The UNEP/UNDP has much experience in dealing with such contamination in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan and not forgetting Lebanon and Gaza. "If one does not look one will not find" and this is the case with the United Nations. In carryout out this thoughtless act they are not only endangering the lives of the people in Gaza and the region but also the world at large. Add to this the dangers and risks they are subjecting to their own staff, contractors and all the other aid agencies such as Red cross, Red Crescent etc and one can see their total disregard for human safety or a clear understanding of the real issues that are behind such evil

weapons.

It is therefore with much sadness that we look upon the anniversary of this terrible event and reflect not only on the pain and suffering endured by the people of Gaza but also look at the bigger picture and realize that this was indeed an act of genocide on a very large scale. I did not wish to be so graphic in my description of this sad event but in doing so I sincerely hope that we can all better understand that this madness has to stop. We must all ensure that when people like Obama, Brown and many other leaders talk about disarmament they really mean it. That must mean that any weapon that contains any form of uranium component must be totally prohibited forever.

To the people of Gaza and to the Palestinians in general I would just like to apologize for these terrible atrocities that were inflicted on your people one year ago.

To the U.S., UK, NATO countries and Israel I would like to shame you all for this War Crime and Genocide that you have inflicted on the Balkans, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Gaza and Pakistan.....not forgetting all the War Vets and the people of the world that have fallen victim to your evil weapons.

To the people of Gaza and to all Palestinians I would sincerely hope that 2010 brings you the freedom you so rightfully deserve and that you persevere with your legal right to seek full sovereignty via the United Nations and the removal of the current blockade by the Israelis of land, sea and air. You do not need to liaise with the Israelis in any shape or form as it has always been your country and they obviously do not seek peace.

We must also keep in mind that both the Christian and Jewish Zionist around the world also want you removed from your land and this must never be allowed to happen.

I received the following report just one day before this special Memorial Day which gave a very clear picture how the Israelis intend to push on in their control of Palestine:

1-Settlers attack Nablus greenhouse, severely damaging property.

2-Israeli forces fire at four youth near Erez, kill three.

3-Pregnant wife of slain former fighter injured in Nablus raids.

4-Nablus governor: Israeli troops killed men in cold blood.

5-Israeli troops seal off Nablus Old City during dawn raids, three dead.

6-Four Palestinians were injured in collision in Halhul, north of Hebron.

7-Israeli bulldozers shut north entrance of Madama village near Nablus.

Other news in offshore Gaza revealed Israeli naval gunboats opened fire on Palestinian fishing boats off the coast of the Gaza Strip. The Israelis targeted dozens of the fishing boats in Al-Sodanya to the north of the Gaza Strip and Al-Nosayrat in the middle of the Strip. As usual the Oslo Accord is totally ignored by the navy who claim that the fishing boats exceeded the allowed distance of fishing for the Palestinians in Gaza which is 3 miles only. These attacks prevent the fishermen to fish and exercise their profession which is the only source of their income. The Oslo Accord allowed them 20 nautical miles but has never been enforced. As they say "Business as usual."

Bless you all at this special time and may the New Year bring you hope and justice.

(Source: paltelegraph.com)

Activists push Egypt to grant access to Gaza

CAIRO (AP) — International activists from 43 countries have appealed to Egypt to reverse a decision denying them access to the blockaded Gaza Strip for a solidarity march.

Ann Wright, a former U.S. colonel and diplomat and march organizer, said Saturday Egypt refused to grant the group access to the strip on "security" grounds.

Wright said the group has been communicating with the authorities for months to organize the march, which is planned to draw attention to the blockade and commemorate Israel's bruising offensive on Gaza one year ago.

She appealed to President Hosni Mubarak to repeal the decision, saying it is not "in the best interest of Egypt."

Egypt is under fire from Arab and Muslim groups for cooperating with Israel in the blockade.

Israel kills 6 Palestinians in surge of violence

NABLUS, West Bank (AP) — An uneasy security agreement between Israel and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is being put to the test.

Israeli troops on Saturday blasted their way into the homes of three wanted Palestinians. Each was killed in a hail of bullets.

Israel's military says the three were targeted for killing an Israeli settler in a roadside ambush earlier in the week. And it says they had turned down a chance to surrender.

Also on Saturday, three young men who were approaching Israel's southern border in the Gaza Strip were killed by shots from an Israeli helicopter gunship.

The deaths made it one of the deadliest days in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since Israel waged war on the Hamas rulers of Gaza a year ago.

Netanyahu headed to Egypt for talks

BEIT-UL-MOQADDAS (AP) — Israel's prime minister says he is traveling to Egypt this week to meet with President Hosni Mubarak.

The declared objective of Tuesday's trip is to discuss Mideast peacemaking. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also expected to discuss negotiations to swap hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned in Israel for an Israeli soldier captured by Gaza resistance fighters in 2006.

Egypt and Germany have been mediating those talks.

Through the mediators, Israel has forwarded its latest proposal to Gaza's Islamic Hamas rulers. They have not responded.

A Netanyahu ally quoted the Israeli leader as telling Cabinet ministers that "it's not clear there will be a deal."

Netanyahu said the deadly shooting of an Israeli settler last week highlighted the risks of a deal.