

## **OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AND THE IRAQ PUZZLE**

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*Birf—Al ways a Step Ahead*

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Iraq has proved an inferno for the US-led coalition during recent past. In other words, the land of Iraq is a sort of swamp for the forces of the West, wherefrom, despite their desperate efforts, they have been unable to free themselves. The gradual transfer of power and American haste in showing indifference to Iraq is only one side of the problem and it depicts how eager are the Americans for leaving off. Iraq became a rather difficult place than it was ever thought by the American think-tanks. The propaganda of Saddam's possession of the notorious "Weapons of Mass Destruction" and his 'heinous' act of providing safe havens to international terrorists in Iraq served as the pretext for the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Although no weapons were ever found—before or after the fall of Baghdad—despite the utmost efforts of IAEA inspectors and the Americans themselves, the Bush Administration was never apologetic on the unscrupulous Iraq War. When the issue of WMD was criticized by the American political circles, the Bush Administration shifted the emphasis from WMD to the very person of Saddam Hussein, saying that Saddam was in himself a danger for the world and to his own people. Thus, Saddam was tried in court and sentenced capital punishment.

The Iraq debacle has a two-decade long historical background. The problem emerged in 1990 when after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, US immediately jumped into the war, thus, rendering this regional conflict as a multinational conflict named Gulf War. It is a historical secret that the annexation of Kuwait was, in fact, instigated by the US herself and the go-between US President George Bush Senior and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was the then US ambassador to Baghdad, April Glaspie.<sup>1</sup> Hence, what apparently turned as Saddam's 'shameful' act was originally an interplay of international actors. Saddam was only a puppet used by some unknown masters to pave the way for the sole superpower of the post-Cold War scenario to land into the region heavily blessed with oil reserves. Thereafter, when once Saddam had gone out of his international borders, instead of supporting Iraq, the catalyst condemned the attack and launched a counterattack at the head of a huge coalition on January 16, 1991. The operation and coalition both had a license of legitimacy obtained from the UNO. The Gulf War, nicknamed Operation Desert Storm, terminated on 11 April, 1991, on ceasefire between the opponents.<sup>2</sup> Saddam Hussein was granted the permission to continue his dictatorial regime, for he would serve the end of US interests in a certain future moment. The miserable situation of Iraqi people did not radically change even after the war, as Iraq had to face UN sanctions. The only option granted by the UN to the Iraqi population for their survival was the UN program of "Oil for Food". Therefore, for almost over a decade, Iraq had to sustain the effects of the Gulf War.

The second Iraq War began on 20 March 2003 and ended only a month and half later on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May.<sup>3</sup> However, the story did not end with the end of the war. A sharp insurgency appeared within a few days of chaos in Iraq. Mahdi Militia, Ba'ath Party fighters and many other militant groups vowed to revenge on the Americans. Although, this insurgency was effectively weakened and, to some degree, quashed by the end of 2008, the Americans had to pay a heavy price for this success. According to the official figures, some 4500 coalition soldiers were killed in the postwar violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Mingst, Karen, *Essentials of International Relations*, New York, 2001, p.58

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003\\_invasion\\_of\\_Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_invasion_of_Iraq)

<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003\\_invasion\\_of\\_Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_invasion_of_Iraq)

The Iraq War was originally a campaign of 43<sup>rd</sup> US President George Walker Bush. It was his desire that the Middle East region be freed from the so-called Weapons of Mass Destruction. Therefore, being able to find an excuse after 9/11 attacks, a massive military campaign was launched against Iraq on the very pattern of Afghanistan. George Bush left Oval Office on 19 January, 2009, after a long tenure of eight years, and his administration abdicated outright. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, Barack Obama entered the office as 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America and his administration took the charge of the US government after Obama's oath. This was seen as a change not only in the US but also around the globe, as Obama himself had promised 'change' during his presidential campaign.<sup>4</sup> Since we are concerned in this thesis with Obama's Iraq policy, we will now focus only on the changed US stance on Iraq.

### **Iraq and Obama—Before and After US Elections**

In February 2007, Barack Obama declared his candidacy for the president and announced that his candidacy was partly based on his promise of troops' withdrawal from Iraq.<sup>5</sup> According to a statesman, "Obama's political career was launched out of opposition to President George W. Bush's Iraq policy."<sup>6</sup> It was, in turn, welcomed by a majority of the US population, who, according to political psychologists, had already been fed up with bizarre Iraq fiasco. Hence, the US public responded to the call of Obama and voted him for the change he was going to bring.

It is indeed interesting that after having been elected, Obama has publicly announced the fulfillment of his promise, giving a timeframe for the return of US brigades from Iraq. The announcement came in February only after a few days of his inception, whereas it was reemphasized in April. The timeframe for the return being 16 months, and that only a handful of American forces would be placed in Iraq for the training of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)—promised President Barack Obama.<sup>7</sup> This stance of Obama on Iraq has been subject to divergent opinions and light political criticism. Of course, the public's response to such an announcement of troops' withdrawal is mixed. Those families that have suffered with the loss of their beloved ones have welcomed the official announcement and those not under a direct effect have criticized it. However, US political circles did not warmly welcome Obama's new policy and criticized his indifference to Iraq. According to the United States Institute of Peace, "it appears that the President would like to leave Iraq's internal problems to the Iraqis and treat Iraq as part of overall regional concerns rather than being his central focus."<sup>8</sup> The Institute of Peace demands immediate attention of Barack Obama towards the points that they enlist under the most attention demanding categories. Let us have a look into these points:

- a. Obama must restore US credibility, prestige and capacity to act worldwide

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<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack\\_Obama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2008/07/07/080707taco\\_talk\\_packer](http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2008/07/07/080707taco_talk_packer)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0509/Obama\\_and\\_Bush\\_in\\_Iraq\\_and\\_Afghanistan.html](http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0509/Obama_and_Bush_in_Iraq_and_Afghanistan.html)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\\_briefings/2008/1218\\_iraq\\_obama.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2008/1218_iraq_obama.html)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\\_briefings/2008/1218\\_iraq\\_obama.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2008/1218_iraq_obama.html)

- b. Improve regional stability of Iraq
- c. Limit and redirect Iranian influence
- d. Maintain an independent Iraq as a single state
- e. Prevent Iraq from becoming a haven or platform for international terrorists<sup>9</sup>

According to George Packer, a columnist in a New York-based magazine “The New Yorker”, “Obama’s rhetoric on the topic seems outdated and out of touch.”<sup>10</sup> He further terms Obama as a “cold-eyed, shrewd politician”. This criticism of the columnist entirely gets roots from Obama’s Iraq stance. On the other hand, the admirers of Obama have cordially welcomed Obama’s policy on Iraq. According to many, the US has been too deeply immersed in the Iraq issue, and it is due to the Iraq problem that a number of other issues of regional and international importance were constantly being ignored by the Bush Administration. Furthermore, even the US Army under Gen. David Petraeus has begun to show the symptoms of a ‘positive’ change. A number of political analysts of the United States of America believe that it was primarily due to the military campaigns against Afghanistan and Iraq that the US economy heavily suffered. The golden days of Clinton era changed into the period of dismay while Bush’s presence in the Oval Office. A huge number of American citizens ran off jobs and industry subverted.

Another interesting twist in the global US foreign policy is the change of the appellation of fight against terrorism. Bush Administration named their fight against terror as “War on Terror” or “Global War on Terror”. However, Obama Administration has changed this campaign into “Overseas Contingency Operation”. Moreover, an official letter was sent by White House to all concerned departments to abandon the use of the phrase ‘War on Terror’. Another important decision of Obama Administration is the closing of Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp as soon as it appears ‘practicable’. Guantanamo Bay is the very notorious camp which got fame for being a camp exclusively used for the persecution of the Muslims. This clearly depicts the difference of approach to the issue of terrorism by Obama Administration. Although, the plan of combating terrorism has not radically changed even after Obama’s inception; however, his position on the issue is rather clearer and straight—a characteristic that Mr. Bush remained unable to display. The historical fact is that Mr. Bush had clearly lined himself up against the Muslim bloc to unite Western Christians against the menace of Islam. He was probably influenced by the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis of Samuel Huntington that predicts the emergence of Muslim bloc as a potential challenge to the modern West.<sup>11</sup> His speeches were full of invocations to God and religious intonations. This exhibits the chivalric spirit of Mr. Bush and his crusading determination when going at war against the Muslim world. Once in an off the record statement on 13<sup>th</sup> of September, 2009, Mr. Bush even went to the far of terming the war against Islamic terrorism as a “Crusade”. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Obama does not seem to have suffered with any kind of Christian prejudice against Islam. He is precise on the

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\\_briefings/2008/1218\\_iraq\\_obama.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2008/1218_iraq_obama.html)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2008/07/07/080707taco\\_talk\\_packer](http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2008/07/07/080707taco_talk_packer)

<sup>11</sup> Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Touchstone, 1997, p.210

eradication of Al-Qaeda and Taliban within the boundaries where the US is already fighting terror with no proposals of launching new campaigns anywhere in the world. Afghanistan and Pakistan are now the regions of Obama's preference for the decisive battle against Taliban-al-Qaeda coalition.

Now let us closely see how Obama views Iraq in the present scenario. Iraq will be discussed here as apart from the problem of Afghanistan despite the fact that Mr. Bush had enchained both of them into the rosary of the same problem. On April 7, President Obama formally announced his wish that the Iraqis undertook their responsibility of looking after their country. This wish rolled up the official stance of Obama Administration on Iraq. He was quoted by BBC on April 7, saying:

“It is the time for us to transfer to the Iraqis. They need to take responsibility for their country.”<sup>12</sup>

Obama passed this statement in Baghdad during his first i.e. unannounced visit to Iraq. He appreciated US troops for their ‘extraordinary achievements’, although he added that the coming 16 months could be a ‘critical time’. When meeting the top Iraqi government officials, he also reiterated his plan to withdraw US troops from Iraq by the end of 2011. His meetings with the Iraqi leaders were seen by many as the final phase of the transition of power. The return of the serving 140,000 US troops in Iraq will eventually transfer the whole state of affairs into the hands of the Iraqi administration and army. The event as well as the statement in question precisely depicts that the rhetoric of Obama is less confused than the rhetoric of Bush. Moreover, Obama has a very practical approach towards important issues with the possibility of considering all peaceful options including dialogue. We are unable to see, however, a similarity of approach during the 8 year rule of Obama's predecessor, George Bush, who had a preference for the option but to rely on the use of power exclusively. There is no doubt that Iraq held the preference of Mr. Bush. And this political hypothesis was later on literally proven when Mr. Bush refused to shift marines from Iraq to Afghanistan in spite of a potential resurgence of insurgency in Afghanistan. Bush family was most probably chiefly concerned with the riches of oil rather than the image of the country.

On the eve of Obama's inception in the presidential office, the Middle East was once again aflame. Israel was at war against Hamas in the Strip of Gaza. History was once again at the juncture of inaugurating a major Arab-Israel conflict. Iraq has been a part of the situation, for the US surge of Iraq was, in one way or another, a preemptive strike to forestall any future damage to Israel by Iraq. However, Obama's inception cooled the situation down without exhaustive diplomatic efforts. There is no doubt that former president George Bush was an unscrupulous supporter of Israel's legal as well as illegal activities. But what has been observed in Obama's stance on the Middle East is a difference of approach. Of course, Obama cannot ignore this piece of land which has been a burning point since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. It is also beyond doubt that Israel exercises a great deal of influence on the US, and any of the US president cannot ignore such an influence on the account of the presence of an influential Jewish community in the United States of America; however, Obama being a realistic politician in the office is more optimistic of bringing the warring world peace and a gift of friendship to the Muslim world.

### **A Critical Look into Obama's Global Policy**

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<sup>12</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7988065.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7988065.stm)

A critical analysis of Obama's agenda will help us understand his overall policy that constitutes the core of his plans. It appears that Obama is more concerned with America's inner problems. He is keen to transform heavily stratified American society into one nation. His is the aim of annihilating racial, cultural, linguistic, and color-oriented disparities of the USA. Another intriguing issue before Obama is the economic crisis, which has equally undermined American economy second time in history. Economic recession has, in fact, broken the backbone of American economy, as a number of banks have declared default. Therefore, what a political scientist can deem from Obama's role in the situation is what one can proverbially term as 'a Daniel leading his people out of difficulty'.

In another perspective, Obama's stance on Iraq can be understood within the spectrum of his overall policy for the Muslim world. Restoration of friendly relations is what constitutes the bedrock of Obama's Muslim world policy. United State of America has been extremely hostile to the Islamic Republic of Iran since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Nevertheless, it was first time ever in the modern American history that a US President forwarded a hand of goodwill towards Iran. This position of Obama is, beyond any doubt, a fantastic turnaround in American foreign policy. Iran has been among the Bush Administration's 'axis of evil', thus, a probable next target. Obama's inception has, nevertheless, dramatically changed the whole diplomatic scenario. Similarly, when coming to the socialist front, Obama seems to have appeared more open-minded toward the 'otherworld' issues than any of his predecessors. This turnaround may be understood by the conservative US historians as a U-turn—hence infidelity—to the longstanding national stance. Nevertheless, the fact is out that the superpower in today's unipolar world can in no way suffice to view only one side of the picture. The presence of an all-powerful media is what matters and distinguishes present day world from the age of Cold War. Awakening of the realization of establishing and maintaining good relations with the world is a cordial desire of the superpower's diplomatic sphere. For instance, a strange situation developed during a summit in Latin America when Obama hastened to shake hand with Hugo Chavez, the socialist president of Venezuela. Therefore, it seems a major concern of Obama's policy that he is striving hard to restore the prestige of the United States as an effective, sole superpower of the world. One must not forget while examining Obama's act that Hugo Chavez has been critical to the United States and Israel and once in a speech the Venezuelan President declared Mr. Bush as 'devil'. Of course, the world has warmly welcomed such change in the US foreign policy.

The transition of power in Iraq came about in 2004.<sup>13</sup> It was a difficult decision for both sides, for the US could not afford to set an independent government in Iraq, whereas the Iraqis lacked the ability to run the state-affairs on their own. Therefore, despite the change of regime, the interim government in Iraq was nothing worth than a dummy. Furthermore, it was plagued by a number of other internal as well as external threats. Ronald Paris, assistant professor of political science in Colorado University, warned the then Bush Administration in the words quoted immediately below.

"A whole series of decisions made by the US has put the White House in a very awkward and difficult situation in Iraq. On one hand, opposition in Iraq to the US presence is growing, but on the other hand, the US can't afford to cut and run. Reconciling these two things is the heart of the challenge."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The event in question is also known as the 30 June Plane of the Transfer of Power.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.colorado.edu/news/releases/2004/179.html>

In the scope of our current thesis, this analysis of Ronald Paris is very relevant. President Obama has almost exactly followed the statesman from Colorado in carrying out his policy on Iraq. Previously, there was a resonance of a US plan to divide Iraq into three i.e. Sunni, Shi'ah and Kurdish lands. However, the plan for the disintegration of Iraq somehow went into anonymity and with the change of regime in the US from Republicans to Democrats, it appears beyond doubt that President Obama has no interest in the division of Iraq. He is ambitious to see Iraq as what the United States Institute of Peace called "an independent Iraq as a single state". It is, thus, a positive rift.

The general postwar elections of Iraq were held on January 30, 2005. Not long after the process of the making of a new constitution of Iraq began. The interesting fact about these elections was that, for the first time in Iraqi history, all religious and ethnic groups were given the opportunity to contest the elections. Some 7000 candidates contested for 275 seats. Same government continues today under Iraq's own leadership. However, a vital difference between the Bush era and the present one is the likelihood of Iraqi government's full-fledged freedom. The government in the regime of Mr. Bush was wholly dependent on the Bush Administration. Nevertheless, Obama has removed all such reins and there has appeared a gradual granting of freedom. Obama's concern for the restoration of America's status of a just although lone superpower of the world is the very vision that has pulled his attention away from Iraq being a US colony. Iraq nowhere stands in his preference while carrying out his Overseas Contingency Operation. It may appear strange to a number of readers that Obama has been a strong opponent of the Iraq War from the very beginning of the US operation in Iraq. Let us get back into history to explore how Obama opposed the Bush Administration's solution of Iraq problem by waging war on Saddam Hussein. He addressed in a high-profile antiwar rally in Chicago in 2002, saying:

"I suffer no illusions about Saddam Hussein. He is a brutal man. A ruthless man. A man who butchers his own people to secure his own power. He has repeatedly defied UN resolutions, thwarted UN inspection teams, developed chemical and biological weapons, a coveted nuclear capacity. He is a bad guy; the world and the Iraqi people would be better off without him. But I also know that Saddam poses no imminent and direct threat to the United States, or to its neighbors, that the Iraqi economy is in shambles, that the Iraqi military a fraction of its former strength, and that in the concert with international community he can be contained until, in the way of all petty dictators, he falls away into the dustbin of history."

The then senator Barack Obama further added to his speech:

"I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a US occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, and with undetermined consequences. I know that an invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale and without international support will only fan the flame of Middle East, and encourage the worst, rather than the best, impulses of the Arab world, and strengthen the recruitment arm of Al-Qaeda."<sup>15</sup>

These excerpts from an old speech very clearly exhibit Obama's distrust in the Bush Administration and a strong opposition for the surge against Saddam Hussein. He believed that Saddam did not pose a direct threat to the US or her interests anywhere in the world; hence Saddam could be left on his own to meet the end of a disastrous fall. His opposition continued during the remaining years of Bush

<sup>15</sup> [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Barack\\_Obama's\\_Iraq\\_Speech](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Barack_Obama's_Iraq_Speech)

Administration and on no occasion in his political career he appreciated Mr. Bush's campaign. He was firm in his conviction that war was not a plausible solution for any or every riddle. This very monotonous track of the US foreign policy is one of the factors that compelled him to declare his candidacy for 'change'. After having been elected, he 'cleaned up the eight year Bush-mess' within only first hundred days of his rule. He indeed appreciated the courage of the American soldiers and their incredible achievement, for it was, according to some military analysts, no less than a miracle that the Iraq plan worked. According to Thomas Rick, "When American military leaders launched surge in Iraq, they were deeply skeptical of its success."<sup>16</sup> But to the American fortune, the plan worked and the critics of Iraq War became a little mild. Obama in his very first visit of Iraq also announced a timeframe for the return of the soldiers, showing that how firm he was on his opposition of Iraq War despite its success. He did condemn war being a campaign of Mr. Bush; however, he appreciated American army for the victory and considered this victory a milestone in American history. When hearing the promise of Obama, the US soldiers in Iraq greeted him with the slogans "we love you Obama".

### **Iraq for Oil or Iraq for Democracy?**

Iraq surge under Bush could be termed as a pursuit for oil, for there was neither a timeframe for the disengagement of the US from Iraq nor a will to do so. However, the campaign towards its end under Obama appears to be a successful mission for democracy. Obama's own statement on the issue in question can be used as a reference. He addressed the US soldiers deployed in Iraq, saying:

"From getting rid of Saddam, to reducing violence, to stabilizing the country, to facilitating the elections—you have given Iraq the opportunity to stand on its own as a democratic country. That is an extraordinary achievement."

Although war, even if used for positive ends, cannot be appreciated, the functioning of democracy in a country like Iraq which had witnessed long nights of dictatorship is appreciable. The end of a sad campaign is what can be called a happy end. Iraqi people now have a will as well as right to vote and choose whomever they like. There is no more Saddam, nor Weapons of Mass Destruction, nor insurgency, nothing in short that may halt the pace of democratic systematization. So, no blame should go to the Iraqis now for not being given a chance to run their own state of affairs. Americans should indeed now quit Iraq as a civilized people who simply came to liberate Iraqis from a vicious dictator. Of course, this is the very motto with which the war was begun. Although the campaign was a reminiscence of "Whiteman's Burdern", it can be justified by its end.

Now we will see a shift of focus from Iraq to Afghanistan. The situation of the change in attention has already been predicted by many and one even commented that 'Afghanistan is to Obama what Iraq was to Bush'.<sup>17</sup> A reversal of stance is still not far from being possible, as Obama has been previously promising to 'refine' his views after consulting the military commanders on the issue. Therefore, Iraq can still occupy a degree of importance to later receive more attention. In fact, a steady shift of focus and a quick withdrawal of marines can, according to some military experts, pose serious threats to the

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<sup>16</sup>[http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0509/Obama\\_and\\_Bush\\_in\\_Iraq\\_and\\_Afghanistan.html](http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0509/Obama_and_Bush_in_Iraq_and_Afghanistan.html)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/is-afghanistan-going-to-be-obamas-iraq-1515332.html>



very integrity of the redefined democratic Iraq. This is the point where many of the statesmen call Obama for reconsideration.

Measuring Obama's overall difference from Bush's policies will paint a difficult situation before us that is not radically different. Obama has certainly cleared up the 'Bush mess', but to a certain degree, he has retained some points of the foreign policy, especially on Iraq, of Bush Administration. The leftover of some 35000 to 50000 US marines in Iraq for an undetermined lag of time is what critics call a suit of Mr. Bush. Here is an example of the situation. Wall Street Journal quotes that Obama was once asked by a Turkish student if his policies were fairly close to the policies of George Bush. He replied in his peculiar style: "Well, just because I was opposed at the outset, it doesn't mean that I don't have now responsibilities to make sure we do things in a responsible fashion."<sup>18</sup> However, Obama calls it a need of time and this need being primarily related to the training of the Iraqi soldiers and to take an immediate counter step in case of a future insurgency. The part of the Bush's Iraq policy was to respond to the ground needs in Iraq, whereas Obama has not only fulfilled his promise of withdrawing the majority of the soldiers, but he is also committed to see Iraq stable with a future presence of a limited number of US troops around Baghdad. This is, of course a smart plan, and Obama has been so far very successful in addressing the circumstances. He is not only looking after the ground needs in Iraq, but also maintaining his original stance against the Iraq War.

## Conclusion

Barack Obama is a very mature politician. He is more realistic than his predecessor in many ways, as he understands the feelings of the nations around and their growing hatred for the Americans. Therefore, he has shown flexibility in almost every issue to bring a durable peace in the world. His stance shows that he is very much inclined to respect the sovereignty of other nations. Iraq still remains a colony of the Americans, but Obama's promise has lit the candle of hope that the Iraqis will have not only the freedom but also sovereignty—chief characteristics of a free nation. This is the promise which Mr. Bush did not make, and thus eventually had to receive shoes thrown by an Iraqi journalist. According to some, it is only a political leap and shows a discrepancy with Obama's previous plan. They believe that Obama followed the direction of the tide and carried out whatever he found feasible. In a critical examination of the situation, this may not be a pure speculation and there may possibly be some truth in it.

Obama's plan can either be ridding of the Iraq puzzle or sincerely granting them full freedom to return like a civilized nation. In whatever way you take it, the plan is indeed beneficial for the Iraqis. Now the focus will essentially turn to Afghanistan and Pakistan, for the major part of the 'Great Game' will be played in these regions.

Our thesis only deals with the present situation. What is the future of Obama's promises is only a matter of conjecture. We cannot predict anything when it comes to the terms of politics. We can simply hope that the promises will be addressed and fulfilled. Now we have to be a good spectator to see if the proposed 16 months are really the final timetable or Obama sees a possibility of extending the stay of the US soldiers in Iraq due to some compelling affairs.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://hedgehogcentral.blogspot.com/2009/04/george-w-bush-barack-obama-iraq-policy.html>

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