

No troops for Iraq

✓
Down
2.8.04

By Javed Jabbar

Pak. f. relation

SINCE the invasion of Iraq in April 2003 and now in July-August 2004, it is neither in the interests of the people of Pakistan nor that of Iraq for us to send our troops there as long as US and British troops remain in that country. Regardless of the banner under which our troops are proposed to be sent and regardless of the terms and conditions under which they will be required to operate, Pakistan should desist from sending either civilian personnel or armed forces to Iraq at this time.

On the face of it, the preceding assertions may appear to be insensitive to the critical needs of a fellow Muslim country, particularly if the present government of Iraq formally requests Pakistan to send our troops. But it is sometimes necessary to be, so to speak, cruel in order to be kind. While respecting the sincerity that may inspire such a possible request the fact remains that the present government of Iraq is one that has been installed in office by an invasive coalition and does not represent the freely expressed will of the Iraqi people, thus reducing, if not removing altogether, the validity of a possible formal request.

The opinion expressed here has nothing to do with the barbaric, reprehensible slaughter of two innocent Pakistani citi-

ment and Al Qaeda remove two of the most fundamental justifications given for creating the mess in Iraq in the first place. And they also expose the belated attempt to use the UN to cover up the naked truth.

These failures alone make the Iraqi case unique. That the Saddam regime was a brutal and repressive entity is undeniable. But, given the fact that states, including the US and UK, are committed to respecting the principle of non-intervention and to requiring specifically worded resolutions by the UN Security Council authorizing military action against a fellow state, and that these fundamental principles were disregarded, knocks the bottom out of the excuses for the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Second, the continued presence of over 100,000 American troops in Iraq after the so-called "transfer of power" prevents any other

text may deepen the perception of real or imagined Pakistani partnership with anti-Iraqi forces in the past. Calling for the unilateral withdrawal of American and British troops from Iraq immediately raises the possibility of a dangerous power vacuum that will only lead to further chaos and mayhem. This possibility requires careful reconsideration in the light of the extraordinary bloodshed and destruction going on under the very noses of the invasion forces. Can conditions get far worse if the invasion forces leave than what conditions already are? Perhaps for some time they will. That will be a painful price to pay. Yet, in the immediate and medium term, it may be a price worth paying.

Once the occupying forces have left the country, the conditions may actually improve. The popular desire for peace and stability and the recognition by the leaderships of the different indigenous forces and parties of their own responsibility are likely to acquire a compelling force, gradually bringing a new stability and order to Iraq leading to free and fair elections with the assistance and support of the United Nations. It is in that phase alone that Pakistani troops could play a welcome and positive role in Iraq.

Within four weeks of the paper transfer of power, force has been frequently used by the US from the air and on the ground. For instance, in Fallujah on July 28, force was applied targeting places suspected of harbouring "terrorists". Dozens died. Unknown

Sending Pakistani troops while the occupation forces remain in Iraq will be in direct conflict with the views of most Pakistanis. The opinion of the vast majority of citizens is predominantly against any form of endorsement of the invasion as also against any alliance with the invaders during their continuing presence in Iraq. Pakistani troops attempting to enforce order at this time will seriously damage our standing in the eyes of the Iraqi people.

bank, representative slaughter
of two innocent Pakistani citi-

zens held hostage by a group of thugs posing as champions of Iraq and Islam. The killers have attempted to disgrace the sacred name of a great faith that enjoins compassion and kindness and abhors murder. Several months before this latest blot on contemporary Muslim history, and on several occasions on electronic media, this writer has expressed exactly the same view: no troops under any circumstances for Iraq.

Why should one take such a position, particularly when Pakistan is one of the most active and substantial contributors of troops to the peacekeeping contingents of the United Nations around the world? The arguments in favour of abstinence are several. First, Iraq in 2003-04 is an even more complex and multi-dimensional case than the average and typical situation in which the UN sends in a multinational force to keep the peace. In countries such as Sierra Leone, Namibia, Haiti, Cambodia, Somalia, East Timor, Bosnia, Kosovo, and other cases, the principal reasons for conflict have been connected with internal implosions within states or conflicts with immediate neighbours.

In the case of Iraq, notwithstanding some other examples in history where hegemonistic and expansionist powers have struck militarily at targets geographically distant from themselves, we have an incidence without precedence in the recent history of the past two or three decades where a single superior power about 8,000 miles distant from the focal point of attack has bulldozed a coalition to lead an invasion in the name of preemption.

Rarely have the factors of religion, economics, politics, history, and military force become so enmeshed with each other and rarely has military action provoked such a powerful protest across the globe, transcending racial, religious, geographical and political divisions, as well as affinities. Iraq is by no means "just another" or "yet another" typical conflict point that requires conventional intervention by the United Nations.

The failure to find a single weapon of mass destruction and also the failure to show a convincing connection between Saddam's govern-

contingent of troops in Iraq to achieve credibility as a separate and autonomous force operating under a command independent of the influence of the US government and the US military. To even speculate that it is possible for the two entities to operate simultaneously on Iraqi soil with the more powerful and the more well-resourced entity — the US forces — being willing to allow the other entity to operate freely is to entertain a sheer fantasy.

In the unlikely event that this does occur, it shall certainly not be seen to be so, either by the eye-witnesses who are the people of Iraq nor by the people of Pakistan nor the people of the world at large. As long as US and British forces remain in Iraq, troops from any other country will be seen as an extension of the present occupation forces.

Sending Pakistani troops while the occupation forces remain in Iraq will be in direct conflict with the views of most Pakistanis. Even if demonstrations and processions in Pakistan against the invasion and occupation have attracted only thousands or hundreds in comparison with the hundreds of thousands in some other countries, the opinion of the vast majority of citizens is predominantly against any form of endorsement of the invasion as also against any alliance with the invaders during their continuing presence in Iraq. Pakistani troops attempting to enforce order at this time will seriously damage our standing in the eyes of the Iraqi people.

With reference to Afghanistan, we are already seen by most people in the Muslim world as having gone far too deep into a relationship with the US which is widely seen as being hostile to the Muslim world. The despatch of Pakistani troops will only worsen the image of Pakistan amongst fellow Muslims across the world. From the viewpoint of the Iraqi people, the presence of a few thousand Pakistani troops alongside large contingents of troops from other countries acting to protect Iraqis from themselves will be seen as interference in the internal affairs of Iraq.

Far from proving to be a positive and healing factor, the Pakistani presence in this con-

ted of harbouring "terror-

ists". Dozens died. Unknown elements continue to kill and injure hundreds of innocent Iraqis. This kind of action is bound to continue. While troops under a United Nations banner will have relatively limited areas of deployment — to protect UN personnel, offices and activities — it is the US forces that will enjoy access to all parts of Iraq making them the most visible and vital factor identifiable with the presence of "foreigners" in Iraq, rather than the United Nations being seen as the more potent presence.

As regards the proposal to the effect that discussions have been initiated for the possibility of a force comprising troops from friendly Muslim nations to be deployed, this may superficially be better than a United Nations force. But here, too, the same condition applies. As long as US and British troops remain in Iraq, even a Muslim force will fail to gain credibility and respect as a genuinely independent force free from the covert influence of US and British troops and American policy.

The savage behaviour of a group of Iraqis with fellow Muslims from another country such as Pakistan as evident from the beheading of two Pakistani citizens on July 27, despite appeals by the president and prime minister of Pakistan, is a grim indicator of how little deference will be given to a Muslim force.

To suggest that Pakistani troops should not go to Iraq in the present context and under any conditions is not, by any means, to give in to threats from terrorists or to hostage-taking blackmail. It is only to suggest that true courage at this time lies in withstanding pressure from whichever source it may come in order to reflect the views and the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of the people in Pakistan who see the original invasion of Iraq as unlawful. Pakistan's participation in any international peacekeeping effort should only begin once a clear-cut, short, precise time-frame has been set for the exit of all US and British troops from Iraq.

The writer is honorary chairman of the International Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution and a former minister.