

COMMENT
LETTERS

Close

US pull-out would intoxicate Arabs

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By Daniel Aronoff

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From Mr Daniel J. Aronoff.

Sir, It is by now universally accepted that the US occupation of Iraq is in deep trouble. Much of the country is ruled by warlords, the insurgency is unchecked and may be growing, and as a result the US has been unable to re-establish pre-war oil production reliably, much less invest to expand capacity or to spend congressionally approved reconstruction monies. Elections remain elusive. Local dislike for the occupiers seems to be growing. The death toll mounts. And yet the assertions in your editorial "Time to consider Iraq withdrawal" (September 10) are so biased, and your recommendation of US troop withdrawal so ill-considered, that one must question whether the FT has succumbed to an irrational phobia towards the US that has so infected the continental political class.

When you state that the Iraqis "have seen their security evaporate, their state smashed and their country fragment into a lawless archipelago ruled by militias, bandits and kidnappers", one might imagine you consider that Iraq prior to the US-led invasion was a peaceful, happy place. It is true there was probably more order, control and national unity than now. But did you forget that such was imposed by one of the most brutal dictators in history? Did you forget about the mass graves, the wholesale slaughter of Shiites, the use of poison gas, the secret police? Your assertion that "Washington's viceroys . . . sidelined many with the skills to rebuild Iraq's services and utilities" ignores the many talented US citizens who have performed their duty as they saw it and have helped to improve important aspects of Iraqi life.

You seem to believe the situation would improve if the insurgents were let in on the political process and US troops withdrew from the region. But have you considered that the history of ethnic violence and intolerance that has plagued the last century of Iraqi history has not simply vanished? If the US were to pull out now they may leave in their wake a trail of blood that makes the current level of violence appear tame in comparison. In fact, history would suggest it as a likely outcome. Not to mention the threat of encroachment by Syria and Iran. Finally, whatever one thinks of the wisdom of the US invasion, to pull out now would vindicate the most fundamental premise of al-Qaeda; that the west has not got the will to fight and can therefore be intimidated to withdraw its influence in the Middle East. This could have an intoxicating effect on the Arab street. Given the importance of the region to the west's standard of living, we can ill afford to allow this to happen; and as it appears Europe can be pushed, it is ever more vital that the US show it cannot.

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