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US in a quagmire in Iraq

By Khalid Hasan

Washington: The United States is in a quagmire in Iraq and is unlikely to take measures that would change the situation for the better, according to a critical appraisal.

Writing in the current issue of the New York Review of Books, former US ambassador Peter W Galbraith maintains that it is impossible for Iyad Allawi, the Iraqi prime minister to succeed as he lacks both the political constituency and the material resources to translate his tough line into effective action. Sixty-one percent of Iraqis were opposed to him in a recent poll that the Americans ignored. The Iraqi forces available to Allawi to implement his "tough line" are neither loyal nor capable.

According the Galbraith, the US-appointed former administrator of Iraq Paul Bremer never realised that his decrees would not legally outlast the occupation. The Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), his legal cover, was largely the responsibility of two of his assistants, both young and one of them a political appointee from the "Pentagon's stable of neo-



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conservative nation-builders." They never consulted an international lawyer, so taken were they with their own grandiose ideas. "The Bush administration's recruitment of staff for Coalition Provision Authority (CPA) is one of the great scandals of the American occupation ... Republican political connections counted for far more than professional competence, relevant international experience or knowledge of Iraq," he points out.

Galbraith writes that the privatising of Iraq's economy was handled by a Bush fund-raiser and then by the brother of the president's press secretary. He bragged to the Chicago Tribune that the Americans were going to teach Iraqis how to do business. The CPA sold Iraqi assets that it had no legal right to do since it was an "occupying power." US spending in Iraq, he adds, has been slow and misdirected. "The US failure to meet the basic needs of ordinary people in postwar Iraq is the major reason so many Iraqis feel so bitterly angry with the occupation. The failure was not a matter of money. From the start the CPA had access to more than \$1 billion in cash left behind by Saddam's regime and \$4 billion in UN oil-for-food funds earmarked for Kurdistan, but redirected to a CPA-controlled budget," he writes. In October last year, US Congress appropriated \$19 billion for Iraq's reconstruction. The CPA also controlled oil export revenues. Eight months after receiving the congressional appropriation, however, the CPA had spent less than \$500 million on reconstruction.

Galbraith argues that the only way out is the establishment of a loose Iraqi federation make up of Kurdistan, Shia Iraq and a Sunni segment. "A loose federation would allow each Iraqi federal unit to have the political system its people choose. Kurdistan could continue to be secular and democratic, while the Shiites could have an Islamic state, but only in the south. Such a federation is already in the making," he explains.

According to the writer, "The United States faces a dilemma in Iraq. If it withdraws prematurely, it risks leaving behind a weak government unable to cope with the chaos that is the breeding ground of terrorism. By staying in Iraq, the United States undermines the legitimacy of the Iraqi government it wants to support, while US military action produces more recruits for its enemies. The advantage of a strategy aimed at loose federation is that it can create powerful regions and thereby a possible escape from our dilemma. The current strategy, if it can be called one, offers no way out."

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