

Iraqis say farewell to George W. Bush

by Gao Shan, Fu Yiming via quin - Xinhua *Sunday, Jan 18 2009, 8:52am*

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BAGHDAD, Jan. 18 (Xinhua) -- "You are a liar and a war criminal! Farewell!" blurted Muhammad al-Salami, a professor in Baghdad University, infuriated by the TV footage of the outgoing U.S. President George W. Bush who was giving a farewell speech after eight years in office.



Bush, despised by Iraqis

Others in the professor's office simply sneered or just kept silence.

"Every time I see Bush on TV, I get angry. He [Bush] was behind hundreds of thousands of crimes against Iraqi people during the past eight years of his presidency," said al-Salami.

Bush waged a global War on Terrorism after 9/11 and asserted that an "axis of evil," consisting of North Korea, Iran, and Iraq was "arming to threaten the peace of the world."

He launched the war with an invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, which led to the quick defeat and the eventual execution of Saddam Hussein.

More than 600,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed in the U.S.-led war. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also said two million Iraqis had fled to neighboring countries.

To some Iraqis, Bush, is a symbol of U.S. hegemony -- a nightmare -- just as the war aftermath is to himself, for not only their nation but also their dreams are shattered relentlessly.

"His war on Iraq was based on false pretexts, that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and relations with Osama Bin Laden and his al-Qaida network," said Professor Salami.

He added that "Iraqis will never forget Bush's crimes, at least they put a farewell kiss on his face by Muntazer al-Zaidi," the Iraqi journalist who threw his shoes at Bush during a news conference at the end of last year.

Udai al-Zaidi, brother of Muntazer al-Zaidi "agreed with the professor's opinion. "My brother's reaction was the best expression for the pains that Iraqis feel toward Bush. The curse of Iraqis and their shoes will continue chasing him even after he leaves his post on Jan. 20 and even until the last minute of his life," he told Xinhua in a telephone interview.

Hadil Imad, a newly-wed Iraqi female television producer who was shot by U.S. soldiers on the New Year's day, also told Xinhua ironically that "I'd like to say, thank you Mr. Bush for your farewell gift, two bullets, to me. It's one of many unforgettable gifts that you offered to Iraqis." The lady still suffers her pain both physically and mentally in a local hospital.

Many Iraqis who had dreamed for the change of life after the downfall of Saddam Hussein are very disappointed with Bush. Some of them even once viewed Bush as a so-called liberator several years ago.

Lamei Al-Naqdi, 79-year-old from al-Karada neighborhood in Baghdad, said "the liberation and democratization of Iraq is a big lie."

"Today's democracy is only among the politicians. I have never witnessed sectarian differentiation and violence among Iraqis as I see in recent years," he added.

There is a sense of frustration and humiliation that many Iraqis feel at the presence of U.S. troops on their soil for years. Under the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), Iraq has gained more oversight over the more than 140,000 U.S. troops now on the ground, representing a step toward a somewhat so called full sovereignty for the war-shattered nation U.S. had promised.

However, Iraqis are skeptical of any deal between Baghdad and Washington.

Iraqi Kurds thank Bush for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. But Dilshad Hassan, a 45-year-old Kurdish businessman in Baghdad, said "Iraq has been destroyed entirely by the war. Consequences for the country and the world are catastrophic in terms of Bush's policy. That's why whatever he says to reconstruct Iraq and spread democracy is false."

Some Iraqis still have mixed emotions over Bush and his war. They are worried about that the withdraw of U.S. forces will drag Iraq into a new round of violence and bloody battles.

According to the SOFA, all U.S. combat troops must pull out of Iraqi cities by the end of June and leave the country entirely by the end of 2011.

An Iraqi journalist, who spoke on condition of anonymity, described his shock on the U.S. troops withdraw timetable as if somebody had showered him with chilled water.

"How could Americans just leave like this?" he asked and added, "They must pay for the loss of Iraq."

Two days later, Bush will step down to make way for Barack Obama and his mantle of change. It's a moment a lot of Iraqis have been waiting for. Will the inauguration of Obama who promised to withdraw from Iraq in 16 months be the dawning of a new age for the war-torn country?

People across the country are trying to absorb the meaning for the country and their own futures.

"I hope Obama will correct the negative results Bush made. Iraq should be a country as wealthy as Gulf countries because we have oil, agriculture and splendid civilization," said Abass Majeed, a 38-

year-old taxi driver from Sadr City in Baghdad.

But Iman Khalil, a 52-year-old widow, does not agree with him. "We will see no basic change between Bush and Obama. All U.S. presidents are the same: To protect Israel and plunder Iraq's oil reserves," she said emotionally.

(Jamal Hashim and Wsiam Habib also contributed to this feature story)

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