

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Editorial: Scaling down war that shouldn't have been

2010-09-01 16:41:00



American troops coming home from Iraq to their families should be proud of their service. They're part of the finest fighting force in the world. President Barack Obama announced in a national address Tuesday that America had "turned the page" on combat operations in the Iraq war. From a peak of 170,000 troops in October 2007, the level now has dropped to 49,700. Combat deaths also have dropped sharply, from more than 100 a month during early 2007, to a handful each month at present. U.S. war deaths in Iraq stand at 4,417, including 41 from Orange County.

It's worth reviewing why this war was a mistake, even as most Americans believe, according to a new poll this week, that Iraqis now are better off. In an editorial Aug. 23, 2002, more than six months before the Iraq invasion, we cautioned the Bush administration to follow the Powell Doctrine, named after then-Secretary of State Colin Powell. It cautions against the too-easy commitment of U.S. troops to foreign wars. And it insists on good reasons for going to war, and on the support of the American people and Congress. Indeed, we insisted at the time, if war was necessary, Congress should formally declare it, as required by the Constitution.

Back in 2002-03, the two main reasons President George W. Bush used to justify a war with Iraq were that dictator Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and that he had ties to the al-Qaida terrorists who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks. But, as we noted, "despite a year of the government looking for proof, it has not shown any indisputable connection between Saddam and the 9/11 terrorists." And we noted that there also was no indisputable proof that Saddam had such terrible weapons, though we acknowledged in 2002 that the possibility existed. When Mr. Powell testified to the United Nations several months later regarding the evidence he had been advised about, it seemed that maybe those possibilities could be true.

But, in the end, the assertion unraveled. After the war started, and Iraq was searched for proof, even President Bush finally came to admit that Saddam had neither WMD nor firm ties to al-Qaida.

Despite the official end of combat, the engagement is far from over, Christopher Preble told us; he's director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. U.S. troops will continue their mission of training Iraqi troops and preparing the country for self-government. He said that Americans should care about Iraqis "having control over their system of government," instead of devolving into some form of tyranny. "But there are limits to what the U.S. government can do to make that happen."

"The war won't be won until all U.S. troops are home," Mr. Preble cautioned. "It's supposed to happen by the end of next year. I hope we stick to that plan." We hope so, too.

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In tribute to the 41 Orange County soldiers and Marines who lost their lives in Iraq:

Cpl. Jose Angel Garibay, 21, Costa Mesa, died March 23, 2003, An Nasiriyah, Iraq

Marine 1st Sgt. Edward Smith, Anaheim, 38, killed April 4, 2003, central Iraq

Staff Sgt. Stephen Anthony Bertolino, 40, Orange, died Nov. 29, 2003, Haditha, Iraq

Spc. Justin William Pollard, 21, Foothill Ranch, died Dec. 30, 2003, Latham, Iraq

Sgt. Eliu A Miersandoval, 27, San Clemente, died Jan. 31, 2004, Kirkuk, Iraq

Pfc. Joel K. Brattain, Yorba Linda, 21, killed March 13, 2004, Baghdad, Iraq

Staff Sgt. William Merrill Harrell, 30, Placentia, died April 8, 2004, Anbar province, Iraq

Staff Sgt. Victor Angel Rosaleslomeli, 29, Westminster, died April 13, 2004, Bahbahni, Iraq

Spc. Trevor Anthony Win`E, 22, Orange, died May 1, 2004, Tikrit, Iraq

Lance Cpl. Rafael Reynosasuarez, 28, Santa Ana, died May 29, 2004, Anbar province

Pfc. Sean Lee Horn, 19, Irvine, died June 19, 2004, Camp Taqaddum, Iraq

Cpl. Manuel Adrian Cenicerros, 23, Santa Ana, died June 26, 2004, Anbar province

Sgt. Moses Rocha, Santa Ana, 33, Killed: Aug. 5, 2004, Iraq

Lance Cpl. Derek Lloyd Gardner, 20, San Juan Capistrano, died Sept. 6, 2004, Anbar province

Spc. Edgar Potayre Daclan Jr., 24, Cypress, died Sept. 10, 2004, Balad, Iraq

Maj. Charles Robert Soltes Jr., 36, Irvine, died Oct. 13, 2004, Mosul, Iraq

Sgt. Quoc Binh Tran, 26, Mission Viejo, died Nov. 7, 2004, Baghdad

Sgt. William Clepper James, 24, Huntington Beach, died Nov. 9, 2004, Fallujah, Iraq

Seaman Pablito Pena Briones Jr., 22, Anaheim, died Dec. 28, 2004, Fallujah

Lt. Cmdr. Keith Edward Taylor, 47, Irvine, died Jan. 29, 2005, Baghdad

Spc. Samuel Sungjune Lee, 19, Anaheim, died March 28, 2005, Ramadi, Iraq

Maj. Ricardo Antonio Crocker, 39, Mission Viejo, died May 26, 2005, Haditha

Cpl. Antonio Mendoza, 21, Santa Ana, died June 03, 2005, in San Antonio, Texas (Iraq)

Capt. Michael David Martino, Irvine, 32, killed Nov. 2, 2005, Ar Ramadi, Iraq

Lance Cpl. Hugo Razziel Lopez-Lopez, 20, of La Habra, died Jan. 27, 2006, in San Antonio, Texas (Iraq)

Lance Cpl. Michael Stuart Probst, 26, Irvine, died Feb. 14, 2006, Abu Ghraib, Iraq

Lance Cpl. Marcus Stephen Glimpse, 22, Huntington Beach, died April 12, 2006, Abu Ghraib

Spc. Raymond Lamar Henry, 21, Anaheim, died April 25, 2006, Mosul

Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Anthony Monsoor, 25, Garden Grove, died Sept. 29, 2006, Ramadi

Staff Sgt. Daniel Isshak, Anaheim, 25, killed Oct. 3, 2006, Tikrit, Iraq

Pvt. Michael Paul Bridges, 23, Placentia, died Nov. 2, 2006, Taji, Iraq

Pfc. Jang Ho Kim, 20, Placentia, died Nov. 13, 2006, Baghdad

Maj. Megan M. McClung, Mission Viejo Age: 34 Killed: Dec. 6, 2006, Iraq

2nd Lt. Mark Jennings Daily, 23, Irvine, died Jan. 15, 2007, Mosul

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Cornell Clinton Chao, 36, Fullerton, died Jan. 28, 2007, Najaf, Iraq

Lance Cpl. Nathan Windsor, formerly of Huntington Beach, 20, killed: March 11, 2007, Iraq

Lance Cpl. Daniel John Santee, 21, Mission Viejo, died April 14, 2007, Ramadi, Iraq

Pfc. Shane Mikel Stinson, 23, Fullerton, died June 23, 2007, Balad

Sgt. Shin Woo Kim, 23, Fullerton, died June 28, 2007, Balad

Staff Sgt. Faoa Leonidas Apineru, 31, Yorba Linda, died July 2, 2007, in Palo Alto (Iraq)

Spc. Brandon Abbott Meyer, 20, Orange, died Jan. 28, 2008, Mosul

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