

March 2003. In coalition with the UK, on the strength of their avowed belief that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, US President George W Bush gives Saddam Hussein and his sons 48 hours to leave Iraq or face war. The Coalition then invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein's government.

The apparent victory of the Allies was extraordinarily swift and decisive. The battle to instal a Western-style democracy, quell the insurgency and unite Sunni, Shia and Kurd under one central government has been quite another story, and one which slipped from the pages from the Western media as Allied troops withdrew and attention turned to the 'good war' overlapping in Afghanistan.

In April this year, against a background of bombings and mass casualties, Iraqis voted in first parliamentary election since 2011 withdrawal of US troops. In the UK, Conservative MP Bernard Jenkin said the report of the Chilcot Inquiry, which began in 2009, was "at least four years overdue", reportedly due to discussions between the Inquiry and Cabinet Secretary Sir Jeremy Heywood over the publication of classified notes and conversations between Prime Minister Blair and President Bush; Prime Minister Cameron promises it will be published by the end of the year. In the Hague, the International Criminal Court is looking at fresh allegations that British soldiers in Iraq tortured and abused civilians during the occupation, and may be called to account for it.

It seems timely for Defence Viewpoints to launch a new monthly bulletin on the situation in Iraq; gathering news and comment from the heart of the country on the killings, the reconstructions, the hopes and fears of a traumatised population.

Here's a quick reminder of key events over the past eleven years:

2003: In July, the US-appointed Governing Council meets for first time. The Commander of US forces says his troops face low-intensity guerrilla-style war. A suicide truck bomb wrecks UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing UN envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello. A car bomb in Najaf kills 125 including Shia leader Ayatollah Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim. In December, Saddam Hussein captured in Tikrit.

2004: Shia militias loyal to radical cleric Moqtada Sadr engage with the Coalition forces. The US military besiege of the Sunni Muslim city of Falluja for a month. Photographs of US abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison outrage the world, permanently damaging the image of US troops globally. The US hands sovereignty to an interim government headed by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. Fighting breaks out in Najaf between US forces and the Shia militia of radical cleric Moqtada Sadr. The US conducts a major offensive against insurgents in Falluja.

2005: The year opens with elections for a Transitional National Assembly. At least 114 are killed by a car bomb in Hilla, the worst single such incident since the invasion. In April, Parliament selects Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as president. Ibrahim Jaafari, a Shia, is prime minister. From May onwards there is a surge in car bombings, bombings and shootings. In June, Massoud Barzani becomes regional president of Iraqi Kurdistan. A draft constitution endorsed by Shia and Kurdish negotiators, but not by Sunni representatives. Eventually approved by voters. In December Iraqis vote for the first, full-term government and parliament since the invasion.

2006: A bomb attack in Samarra triggers sectarian violence, which rolls on throughout the year. Hundreds are killed. In April President Talabani asks Nouri al-Maliki to form a new government. Throughout May and June - More than 100 civilians per day killed in Iraq, according to the UN. Al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi killed in air strike. More than 200 die in car bombings in Sadr City, the worst attack on the capital since the invasion. In December the Iraq Study Group report describes the situation as grave and deteriorating. Saddam Hussein executed for crimes against humanity.

2007: US President Bush announces a 'surge': thousands more US troops to shore up security in Baghdad. A bomb in Baghdad's Sadr City market kills more than 130 people, the worst single bombing since 2003. Insurgents detonate three trucks with toxic chlorine gas in Falluja and Ramadi, injuring hundreds. Bombings in Baghdad kill nearly 200 people in April, the worst day of violence since a US-led security drive began in February. Truck and car bombs hit two villages of Yazidi Kurds, killing at least 250. Kurdish and Shia leaders form an alliance to support Maliki's government, but fail to bring in Sunni leaders. Blackwater security guards allegedly fire at civilians in Baghdad, killing 17. In the final quarter of the year, the number of violent civilian and military deaths continues to drop, as does the frequency of rocket attacks. Britain hands over security of Basra province to Iraqi forces.

2008: Parliament passes legislation allowing former officials from the Ba'ath party to return to public life. There is a crackdown on militias in Basra, pitched battles with Moqtada Sadr's Mehdi Army. Hundreds are killed. US forces hand over control of Anbar province, the first Sunni

province to be returned to Shia-led government. A security pact is concluded between the Iraqi and US governments: all US troops to leave the country by the end of 2011.

2009: Iraq takes control of security in the Green Zone and assumes more powers over foreign troops based in the country. President Obama announces the withdrawal of most US troops by end of August 2010. Up to 50,000 will stay on into 2011, in training roles. In June, US troops formally hand over security duties to new Iraqi forces. New opposition forces gain in elections to Kurdistan parliament, reducing the power of established parties. Barzani is re-elected president. Two car bombs near the Green Zone in Baghdad kill at least 155 people in October. In December, suicide bombings in Baghdad kill at least 127 people, and Iranian troops briefly occupy an oilfield in Iraqi territory.

2010 Candidates linked to the Ba'ath Party are temporarily banned from parliamentary polls. "Chemical" Ali is executed. Parliamentary elections are held in March, but a new government is not approved for nine months after. The last US combat brigade leaves. A church in Baghdad is seized by militants, 52 people killed. The new government includes all major factions. Talabani is president, al-Maliki prime minister.

2011: The radical Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr returns after four years' self-imposed exile in Iran. Oil exports from Iraqi Kurdistan resume. The government says it will shut Camp Ashraf, home to thousands of members of the People's Mujahedeen of Iran. In summer violence escalates again. More than 40 apparently co-ordinated nationwide attacks occur in one day. In December US troops finally pull out. Nearly 200 people are killed in the wake.

2012 Tight security is mounted for an Arab League summit in Baghdad. A pre-summit attacks kills scores of people. Oil exports from Iraqi Kurdistan are halted amid a row with Baghdad over contracts with foreign firms. The fugitive former Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi is sentenced to be hanged for murder. Iraq cancels a \$4.2bn deal to buy arms from Russia, over alleged corruption within the Iraqi government.

2013: Troops storm a Sunni anti-government protest camp in Hawija near Kirkuk, killing more than 50. At least 500 prisoners, mainly senior AQ, escape from Iraqi prisons. Levels of violence equal those of 2008. In September there is a mass killing at Camp Ashraf. Regional elections in Iraqi Kurdistan are won by the Kurdistan Democratic Party. October is the deadliest month since April 2008, with 900 killed. At least 35 people are killed in twin bombings of Baghdad churches on Christmas Day.

2014. In January, pro-al-Qaeda fighters infiltrate Fallujah and Ramadi. Government forces recapture Ramadi fail to retake Fallujah. In March the electoral commission board resigns over political interference. The election went ahead on 30 April. Results are not expected before the end of May. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is seeking a third term in power

Post-election, a wave of bombings and shootings around the capital takes the level of violence back up to 2008 levels. AFP said five off-duty army officers - ranked between lieutenant and major - were killed by militants in Salaheddin province, northwest of Baghdad. They were wearing civilian clothing and were on their way to their unit deployed in the western province of Anbar.

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