

Early power transfer puts focus on Iraq's future

Handing over sovereignty to Iraqis two days early helps avoid a terrorist attack, but experts disagree about whether it aids the country's long-term chances for stability

The following are solicited comments and excerpts from *The Detroit News'* syndicated writers and others about Monday's transfer of power from the U.S.-led coalition forces to the Iraqi leadership that took place two days before a scheduled June 30 deadline:

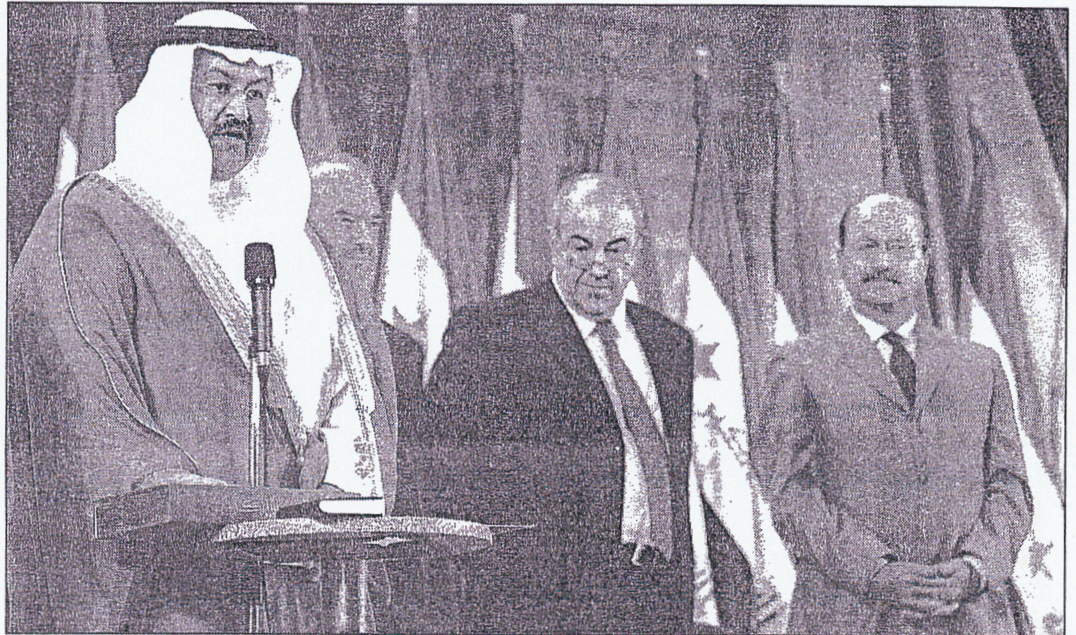
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Danielle Pletka, vice president of foreign and defense policy studies, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research in Washington, D.C.: In reality, the American hand-off occurred several weeks ago; the June 30th date was an arbitrary deadline more interesting to publicity-hungry terrorists than to normal Iraqis. For Iraqis longing to be led by one of their own, the elevation of Prime Minister Ayad Allawi a month ago was the real date of liberation.

As far as the terrorists are concerned, the transfer will do little to sate their appetite for killing. On the other hand, it will make manifest to the Iraqi people that they, and not the coalition, are the real targets. In time, that will constrict the operating environment for the killers, improve intelligence and enable Iraqi and coalition forces to secure Iraq's future.

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Juan Cole, University of Michigan history professor: Paul Bremer suddenly left Iraq on Monday, having "transferred sovereignty" to the caretaker Iraqi government two days early. It is hard to interpret this move as anything but a precipitous flight. Since the U.S. military is so weak in Iraq and appears to have poor intelligence on the guerrilla insurgency, the Bush administration could not take the chance that a major bombing or other attack would mar the ceremony.

This exercise is a publicity stunt with almost no substance to it. PBS' Gwen Ifill said Sunday that she had talked to National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and that her hope was that when something went wrong in Iraq, the journalists would now grill Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi about it rather than the Bush administration.

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Daniel Pipes, Middle East Forum in Philadelphia: What changed in Iraq in late June 2004? Asked that question, L. Paul Bremer, the top U.S. administrator in Iraq, gave this stunning reply back in February: The Coalition Provisional Authority will go out of existence, he said, "But it's very important to stress



David Guttenfelder / Associated Press

Iraqi President Ghazi Al-Yawer, left is sworn into office as Vice President Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih look on Monday in Baghdad, Iraq.

that that's about all that changes. There will be the world's largest embassy here. We will have more than 100,000 troops here. The embassy will be responsible for overseeing the spending of \$18.6 billion. ... The only thing really that changes is that I leave and will be replaced by an American ambassador to the mission."

Bremer candidly summed things up: The transfer of power is more symbolic than real and will only lightly affect the evolution of post-Saddam Hussein Iraq.

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Tarik Daoud, Iraqi-American, president of Al Long Inc. in Warren and a member of The Detroit News Editorial Page Advisory Panel: I don't think anybody anticipated the hand-over of power would come two days early, which was pure genius. Let the Iraqis govern their own country. I have two sisters back in Iraq, one in Baghdad and one in Basra, and they said, "Let's see what we can do for ourselves." I think it's a great start for a country that should be democratic with a great passion for freedom.

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Jay Ambrose, Scripps Howard News Service: It was smart — a sound tactic — for the United States to transfer sovereignty to Iraqis two days before the officially announced plan. Insurgents

were thus caught off guard, although it scarcely follows that they will now lay down their arms and follow the new indigenous leadership like little lambs.

Killings will continue. But don't suppose, at least not yet, that the new government will prove ineffectual in fighting back, or that the U.S. forces will become inadequately aggressive or that there will not be meaningful international assistance in training Iraqis to maintain internal security.

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Spencer Ackerman, The New Republic Online: So this is how the formal part of disastrous occupations end: with an unexpected, premature whimper, to deny insurgents a bang. Two days ahead of schedule, in what the *Washington Post* described as a "hastily arranged ceremony," the U.S. formally transferred sovereignty to Iyad Allawi's interim Iraqi government. There is no more Coalition Provisional Authority: Occupation chief Paul Bremer has already left the country, surely relieved to have gotten out with his life.

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Frida Ghitis, a former CNN reporter and current world affairs writer in Georgia: The stealth ceremony represented an acknowledgment that events in Iraq have not gone according to Washington's plan. And yet, promising signs are rising from the

smoldering soil of a turbulent Iraq.

A poll commissioned by the United States shows more than two-thirds of Iraqis support their new leaders — an extraordinary number given the country's deep ethnic divisions. Eighty percent of Iraqis say they expect the new government will make things better for them. A separate poll conducted three months ago by Oxford Research International showed more than 70 percent of Iraqis expect life to become better in the year ahead.

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Chris Preble, director of foreign policy studies at Cato Institute in Washington, D.C.: The hand-over of limited political sovereignty to the interim Iraqi government is largely symbolic, but it will be an important symbol if it is seen as the first step toward ending the U.S. military occupation in the country. Unfortunately, nearly 140,000 American troops remain in Iraq, and there are no plans for their removal.

The presence of these troops undermines the legitimacy of the new government and opposition to the occupation becomes a rallying cry for insurgents and terrorists. Therefore, the Bush administration should follow the sensible decision to transfer political sovereignty with a formal plan for withdrawing the U.S. forces.