
ALL EYES ON IRAQ OIL

30.01.2017

Dawn, 29 Jan 2017

While addressing the intelligence community in Washington DC, a day after swearing in, he said, We shouldve kept the oil, when we got out of Iraq. Regretting the slip up, he then added, OK, maybe well have another chance. This is simply outrageous!

With the US budget drained by its involvement in the wars in the Middle East, Trump went on to add another dimension. If we took the oil (then) you wouldnt have ISIS (today). And we would have had wealth. We have spent right now \$6 trillion in the Middle East.

When asked whether he plans to fix that mistake and claim Iraqs oil, the president said he would rather not give away his military plans.

Clarifying the scenario later, White House press secretary Sean Spicer stressed: Trump wants to be sure America is getting something out of it for the commitment and sacrifice it is making.

This wrongs history. The US still has troops in Germany and Japan but did not take into possession their natural resources.

Taking Iraqs reserves could be a tough call. After all the United States couldnt quell Iraq after spending more than \$2tr and deploying at one point more than 170,000 troops.

Trump statement brought about a sharp response. Iraqs oil is the property of Iraqis, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi underlined. Mr Abadi went to ask, Did he mean in 2003 or to prevent the terrorists from seizing Iraqs oil?

Presidents Trump words shook Iraqis. BuzzFeed News quoted a 27-year-old, Iraqi security official as saying: We kept our ammunition and weapons from the time the Americans left, for fighting ISIS. But once ISIS is gone we will save our weapons for the Americans.

This debate is not new □ and I stand a witness to it. The Iraq war was for oil, many had argued then. Though most Americans dont believe this war is about oil, much of the rest of the world does, Steven Clemmens wrote in The New York Times on April 9, 2003, the same day US troops helped topple the giant statue of former Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein.

Even people in Washington have been conceding the role of oil in the Iraq (mis)adventure.

Washington insider, the former FED chairman, Alan Greenspan in his 2007 memoirs underlined, I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.

The commander of US CENTCOM during the Iraq War, General John Abizaid, too agreed in a BBC commentary: Of course [the Iraq war] is about oil, we cant deny that.

Writing for The Guardian on the 11th anniversary of the 2003 Iraq war, Dr Nafeez Ahmed emphasises: So Saddams WMD was not really the issue (behind the Gulf war). The real issue, he argued, is candidly described in a 2001 report on energy security □ commissioned by then US Vice-President Dick Cheney and published by the Council on Foreign Relations and the James Baker Institute for Public Policy.

Eleven years on, there should be no doubt that the 2003 Iraq War was among the first major resource wars of the 21st century. It is unlikely to be the last, Dr Ahmed underlined.

Rex Tillerson knows it well. Before the 2003 invasion, Iraqs domestic oil industry was fully nationalized. Some 13 years later, it is largely privatised and utterly dominated by foreign firms.

All this is not out of blue. During the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo, Washington even considered taking over Saudi and other Arab oil fields, British government documents declassified in 2004 revealed.

Though no explicit military plan was mentioned, but the documents do show that British leaders were worried by a conversation between US Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger and Lord Cromer, the British ambassador to the United States. Schlesinger told Cromer then, It was no longer obvious to him that the US could not use force.

British Prime Minister Edward Heath too was worried by Schlesingers tough talk, as well as hints of military action from the then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. A British intelligence report then concluded that the United States could opt for a rapid operation to seize (Arab) oilfields.

President Trump is now reigniting those fears. And these carry grave consequences. Is Mr Trump aware of those?

Kaynak/Source: