Leave as soon as you sensibly can

Aug 28th 2008
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Iraqis naturally want their country back, and should have it as soon as they think they are ready

IT IS a cheering new sign of confidence that Iraq’s prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, is now demanding an agreement with the United States that would require all American troops to leave the country by the end of 2011. That is a bit later than Barack Obama’s proposal to bring them home by May 2010 and a bit earlier than John McCain’s more tentative hopes for a withdrawal by 2013. But it suggests that the spectrum of serious possibilities is narrowing. It shows that Iraqis are beginning to believe in their ability to stand on their own feet. And it flashes a ray of light at the end of Iraq’s still dismally dark tunnel.

Iraq is far less horrible than it was two years ago. The Americans’ surge of extra troops, a series of ceasefires and deals with once hostile Sunni tribes in the west and with Shia militias in the slums of Baghdad, the windfall of extra cash from oil exports: all these things have given the country fresh hope.

But it is still a bloody mess. Some 4m Iraqis have fled the country or remain displaced from their homes within it. Hundreds are still being killed every month. A vicious insurgency persists, especially in the mixed-sect provinces north of Baghdad and around the northern city of Mosul. No solution to the rancorous dispute over the now mainly Kurdish-run city of Kirkuk is in sight. The Iraqis have yet to decide how to manage the oil and dish out its revenue. Above all, the newly dominant Shia Arabs have yet fully to accommodate the aggrieved Sunnis, who ruled Iraq under Saddam Hussein and since its inception as an independent country nearly 80 years ago.

So Mr Maliki’s optimism must be tempered with many a caveat. His new insistence on a strict timetable is partly intended to burnish a nationalist image in the face of his populist Shia rival, Muqtada al-Sadr, who has long demanded the immediate removal of the Americans. Though the Sadrists may not stand in the upcoming provincial elections as a party, individuals known as disciples of Mr Sadr are likely to do well. And Mr Maliki knows that what is agreed upon with an outgoing American administration may have to be adjusted by a new one; deadlines will be subject to shifting circumstances.

In any event, he still has a lot to do to keep Iraq heading in the right direction—and give it a chance of meeting a tighter deadline for an American exit. For one thing, he should strive far harder to bring into a new national-security structure the Sunni fighters known as “Sons of Iraq”, whom the Americans have been paying to fend off al-Qaeda and other insurgents in Sunni areas of Baghdad and in western Iraq. Instead, there have been alarming reports that Mr Maliki’s men have been seeking to arrest several hundred of the leading “Sons”, thereby risking a deeper rupture between Iraq’s two main Arab communities. It is also vital that Mr Maliki overcomes recent glitches to ensure that provincial elections, due late this year or early next, do take place, so that the Sunnis who had previously boycotted them are re-empowered. Parliamentary elections should follow at the end of next year. It is by no means certain that Mr Maliki will keep his job as prime minister.
Moreover, any Iraqi leader will still need the flexibility to call on foreign allies’ military muscle. Iraq’s army has improved but cannot yet defeat the insurgency on its own. If Mr Obama wins the presidency, he may prove wisely more elastic in his interpretation of an American withdrawal; Mr McCain still rightly refuses to be hemmed in by deadlines. If Iraq’s leader tells the Americans to go forthwith, they must do so. But that is unlikely to happen in a hurry. Whatever the arguments over the American-led invasion, it remains the case that a hectic exit would be bad for everyone, especially the Iraqis.

**Instructions:** this is a test of your ability to read and understand a text in English and to express yourself in the written language. **Answer all the questions** and make your answers complete and thorough. **Use your own words.**

**A:**

1. What is the new attitude of Iraq’s government to the management of the conflict?
2. What is the present situation of the Iraqi people?
3. What are the tasks of Iraq’s prime minister in the near future?
4. The author says that “any Iraqi leader will still need the flexibility to call on foreign allies’ military muscle”. What does this mean?
5. Look back at the article. Match the words or expressions in the box to the definitions:

   1. Slums  
   2. Windfall  
   3. Glitches  
   4. Call on  
   5. Hemmed in

   a) Be prevented from making one’s own choices.
   b) An unexpected large amount of money.
   c) Unexpected defeats.
   d) Poor areas of a town where houses are in a very bad condition.
   e) Officially ask a person/ an organization to do something.

**B:**

Summarize the basic ideas in the text. Write about 150 words.
Balance the ins and outs
By F. Field, The Guardian, Sept.8 2008

The European Commission’s population projections at the end of last month should result in calling time on the UK’s open door immigration policy. It predicted that within 50 years Britain would become the most highly populated country in Europe. England is already about to overtake the Netherlands at the most densely populated country in the European Union. On the government’s own figures, the population growth due to immigration by 2031 will require building something like seven new Birminghams. This is simply not sustainable.

To highlight a much better alternative to this open door policy, Nicholas Soames and I are today announcing a cross-party group, Balanced Migration. Our central idea has the advantage of being both simple and workable. We propose cutting the link between economic migration and the virtually automatic right of workers from abroad to settle here permanently.

Every poll emphasises how deeply concerned voters are about the rate of immigration and its impact on British society. Late in the day, both the government and the opposition are feeling their way towards a new policy. Neither party’s approach has much prospect of controlling, let alone reducing, the number of newcomers who become permanent residents.

The government claims it will control immigration through its new points system. By a subtle use of mirrors it suggests that this is based on the Australian model. What the government doesn’t say, however, is that, unlike here, the Australian government starts by deciding the number of new citizens it believes it can be integrated.

The Tory proposals are no better. Shadow ministers talk about a cap but fail to specify what they mean. Their approach is more than likely to result in another bureaucratic nightmare. Governments are not good at guessing the labour needs of the economy.

What is new is our insistence both on cutting the link between economic migration and settlement and advocating that employers should be the drivers and the guardians of such arrangements. The proposals will, therefore, maintain competitiveness.

Employers would, therefore, have a vested interest in policing the system properly. Our proposal would also minimise the cock-ups that any centrally directed approach invariably has in guessing future labour market demands. Not so long ago we saw health planners issuing contracts like sweets for overseas doctors when the first wave of extra “home produced” doctors was about to hit the labour market. Our group’s objective is summed up in its name. The overall goal in the longer run would be to bring into balance the number of people coming into Britain to settle with the number who leave to live elsewhere in the world.

Workers who have done well, and have proved their long-term worth to their company, and who did not wish to return home, would be free to bid for a place in a strictly limited annual quota set by the

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1 A bad mistake, or something that has been done very badly.
government in the light of the circumstances at the time. But there would be no automatic right to those places.

Our approach does not, of course, solve all Britain's problems on the social cohesion front. But it does offer, for the first time, a real possibility of controlling the number of new citizens, thereby achieving a degree of population stability.

The aims of our group fit in with the government's objective of seeking educational reforms that raise significantly the skill levels of young people coming into the labour market. Employers faced with our system would have, for the first time, a vested interest in increasing the skills of their own workforce and better-skilled school leavers. Above all, it would protect the position of low-paid workers who have borne the brunt of the recent influx into Britain.

We are putting these ideas forward to start a debate. The onus is now on the political establishment to respond in a way that also meets the overwhelming demand of voters.

Instructions: this is a test of your ability to read and understand a text in English and to express yourself in the written language. Answer all the questions and make your answers complete and thorough. Use your own words.

A:

1. Why are the politicians rethinking UK's immigration policy?
2. The Balanced Migration group proposes “cutting the link between economic migration and the virtually automatic right of workers from abroad to settle here permanently.” What do they mean by this?
3. How would the group decide on how many people should settle in Britain?
4. On what grounds would an immigrant be given the right to live permanently in Britain?
5. Look back at the article. Match the words or expressions in the box to the definitions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Poll</th>
<th>2 cap</th>
<th>3 to bear the brunt</th>
<th>4 to fit in</th>
<th>5 vested</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Having a very strong reason for wanting things to happen in a particular way;</td>
<td>b) A limit;</td>
<td>c) To receive the worst part of something that has a bad effect.</td>
<td>d) To adapt well to something.</td>
<td>e) when lots of people are asked what they feel about something.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

B: Summarize the basic ideas in the text. Write about 150 words.
Where the shoe pinches

Aug 21st 2008
From The Economist print edition

Brazilians scrim on travel and Russians on milk; Americans still love films

OLD-FASHIONED Russians love kefir, made from fermented milk; in Vietnam, there is a kind of cold coffee, called ca phe sua da, made with sweet, condensed milk. Consumption of both these tipples is sagging, after a jump in the price of the dairy products they contain.

Almost everywhere in the world, people are feeling the pinch because of higher food and fuel prices. But levels of optimism and pessimism, and the ways in which people act on their mood, seem to vary in a peculiar way, according to Nielsen, a marketing-information firm. And the countries where people complain most about feeling squeezed are a mixture (see chart) of rich and poor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not a penny to spare</th>
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<tr>
<td>% of respondents who say they have no discretionary income, top 10 countries*</td>
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* Of a survey of 15 countries

Some findings confirm stereotypes: if they have any spare money, consumers in the Asia-Pacific region are more inclined to save it than to splurge. Some 57% of them say they put any disposable cash straight in the bank. For Russian consumers, who only 15 years ago had little to consume at all, clothing is a priority: over two-thirds say their wardrobe is the most likely beneficiary of any spare funds they have. People in Nordic countries view a holiday as a necessity, whereas Brazilians seem happier to stay at home.

Across the world, people want to save money on food, but shopping habits vary a lot. In Latin America—where staples such as powdered milk, cooking oil and rice have risen in price by up to 40%—people say they are now more likely to buy food frequently and in modest amounts. In both Europe and America, the response is the opposite: people who drive to hypermarkets in search of the best bargains say they are doing so less often than before, in part because the cost of filling their tank has gone up.
At least in rich countries, the rise in the price of food (and the share of the family budget it absorbs) has to be kept in perspective. Some 50 years ago, about 30% of household income in Britain went on food; now it is half that. Shoppers of an earlier generation would be startled to learn that Britons bin a third of the food they buy, and Americans not much less. In rich countries, there has been a spurt of interest in using leftovers, but so far this is a middle-class fad, whether ordinary folk will follow is still uncertain.

In Europe, consumers now buy food in the way they purchase clothes: going downmarket for basics and splurging on the odd treat. Gourmet chocolate bars are the equivalent of a designer handbag. In fact, cost-conscious consumers may start buying more fancy food than before, to make up for going out to restaurants less.

For many, spending for pleasure is impossible: around one-fifth of respondents in Britain, Germany and France say they have no spare cash after covering the basics. A quarter of Americans say the same. But some habits are immune to gloom. Eight out of ten American adults say they still go to the cinema; maybe spine-chilling movies like “The Dark Knight” make real life more bearable.

**Instructions:** this is a test of your ability to read and understand a text in English and to express yourself in the written language. Answer all the questions and make your answers complete and thorough. Use your own words.

**A: Answer the following questions**

1. Everywhere in the world people are having to face higher food and fuel prices. How are people reacting to this situation?
2. In what way have consumption patterns changed between present-day and past generation shoppers?
3. What is happening in rich countries to shopping for food?
4. Look back at the article. Match the words or expressions in the box to the definitions:
   
   1. Fad 2. fell the pinch 3. splurge 4. spurt 5. staple  
   
   a) An important product, especially a food that people eat regularly;
   b) to have less money than you need;
   c) a sudden increase in something, for example speed or development;
   d) something that is popular or fashionable for only a short time;
   e) to spend a lot of money, especially on something special;

**B:**
Summarize the basic ideas in the text. Write about 150 words.
Not a penny to spare
% of respondents who say they have no discretionary income, top 10 countries*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Consumer confidence index†, H1 2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>51</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
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<td>Turkey</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>82</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>99</td>
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</table>

*Of a survey of 51 countries
†100 or more implies optimism about personal finances
Source: Nielsen