

Facing up to defeat in Iraq

A game plan that makes the best of a tinderbox

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Expect a massive U.S. defeat in Iraq. By defeat, I mean that we will not accomplish any of the goals articulated by President Bush for starting the war against Saddam Hussein and Iraq.

We will not find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq because there are none to be found. But the U.S. invasion has guaranteed the increased proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Iran, certain that if it possessed a nuclear arsenal, those weapons could deter any American invasion of its country, is rushing headlong to develop them.

We will not end Iraq's support for international terrorism because there was no Iraq support for terrorism before the U.S. invasion. But the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq has acted like a magnet to attract terrorists longing to inflict casualties and defeat the U.S. in its Iraq adventure.

We will not create a democracy in Iraq because while advanced weapons and sophisticated communications equipment can accomplish many things, they cannot bring about the democratization of a society. That requires the social or psychological prerequisite for democracy, utterly absent in Iraq. In fact, it is quite strange that having invaded Iraq for the benefit of Iraqis, we have not managed to collect any data on the number of Iraqis we have killed or wounded in the course of trying to liberate them from tyranny. But what we have managed to do is generate so much hatred around the Islamic world that a surge of recruitment to terrorist organizations has occurred.

Nor have we managed to increase oil supplies. The price of oil is higher than it would be absent the U.S. invasion of Iraq by between \$4 and \$8 per barrel--what is called the war premium. Some of that premium comes from the sabotage of Iraqi oil facilities and the uncertainty over the future of Iraqi oil exports. More comes from the new terrorism in Saudi Arabia. Small teams attack expatriates there, but never Saudi oil facilities. The oil facilities are the national patrimony of the Saudis. By not attacking the facilities and the source of Saudi national wealth, the terrorists there are not offending the Saudi people. Instead they are attacking expatriates who work in the Saudi oil industry.

The goal of the terrorists is to drive the expatriates from the kingdom. The result in the short run would not be a slowdown of Saudi oil production. The Saudis are certainly capable of managing production and export. The expatriates, however, are crucial for providing the technology for exploration and for increasing production. If they are driven out of Saudi Arabia, we will not be able to depend on Saudi exports to fuel our economy.

Nor will we increase the security of Israel. Israelis remember the chilling Scud attacks that Hussein launched against them in the first Gulf war. Many Israelis and Americans saw Israel's security guaranteed

by the overthrow of Hussein. We have accomplished that, of course, but the security of Israel has not been enhanced. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani--the most important Islamic cleric for the 60 percent of Iraqis who are Shiites--refers to the "usurping Zionist entity" and calls for the "liberation of the occupied lands." Of course, when he refers to "occupied lands," he means pre-1967 Israel and not just the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The ayatollah has yet to demonstrate that he recognizes the legitimate existence of Israel--within any borders in the Middle East.

The way to bring peace to Israel is to enhance the role of the U.S. as an honest broker, renew negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, and work toward the creation of a meaningfully independent Palestinian state.

So we will not succeed in solving the problems of the Islamic world through our efforts in Iraq. What then is the answer?

First, nothing short-term. A massive and long-term effort must be made against the terrorists. We did it and we triumphed in the Cold War. We can and we will here, but we need leadership that speaks the truth to the American people; the truth of the nature of the task.

Second, this is not to deny the things we can do in the short run--cooperate and coordinate with police and intelligence services. More training and resources to police departments everywhere. Arresting and punishing terrorists wherever they can be found.

Third, nation-building--a task this country has avoided. Let me explain. The Marshall Plan convinced many Americans that foreign aid and technical assistance to poor countries could transform them. We found since then that this is not the case. Nation-building is a hard and long-term effort. So hard and so long-term that Americans have largely shunned for decades the burden to do so. President Bush, in fact, promised when he came to office that he would do no nation-building. Former President Bill Clinton did little of it. Yet it is from the poorest and least capable countries that terrorists emerge. Whether Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia or Yemen or Somalia, terrorists inevitably emerge from failing countries. A massive U.S. effort to coordinate and strengthen international commitments to nation-building is necessary.

Fourth, the U.S. needs to come to terms with the Islamic world in a way utterly different than we have. This can no longer be done by the U.S. alone. America needs to lead a global coalition of countries that engage the Middle East to development and modernity.

But U.S. leadership will be in short supply and without a commitment for a massive increase in government funds allocated to nation-building. For while we are spending \$500 billion in 2004 on the U.S. Armed Forces, total U.S. government spending for non-military international affairs--all the foreign aid we give poor (and not so poor) countries, all our diplomatic efforts abroad--the embassies and consulates, all our propaganda efforts through the Voice of America, Radio Marti, and others, the UN, World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, even the Peace Corps--all that totals \$26 billion.

We have such an imbalance that the resources for nation-building do not exist. The U.S. Armed Forces are so dominant, moreover, that they bear responsibility for rebuilding Iraq. That is not a model we can follow in other countries, unless we invade them first.

The way ahead is troubling and uncertain. The U.S. is pursuing neither the right strategy nor tactics to solve our dilemma in Iraq, and as a result faces defeat. Nor are we following what needs to be done for more success against those terrorist groups that seek to damage our interests. We need creative thinking and creative leadership as never before. We need to mobilize the American people for a costly, lengthy and painful national campaign.