



SUNGYOON CHOI

the new Iraqi plan to ensure that it addressed these mistakes. They report that it does. They also report that this plan can work..."

The most important reason for the U.S. failure to secure Baghdad is that a majority of Baghdad residents see the United States as a foreign occupation army and the Iraqi government as a puppet regime of the occupying power. The presence of additional foreign troops patrolling Baghdad neighborhoods is likely to intensify the resistance than mollify it. An additional 18,000 troops in a city of five million will do little to secure neighborhoods where the majority of the population sees such forces as an illegitimate foreign occupation force. And lessening "restrictions" on the operations of U.S. forces is not likely to somehow endear them to the population whom already views attacks on the U.S. forces as legitimate.

"This is a strong commitment. But for it to succeed, our commanders say the Iraqis will need our help. So America will change our strategy to help the Iraqis carry out their campaign to put down sectarian violence — and bring security to the people of Baghdad. This will require increasing American force levels. So I have committed more than 20,000 additional American troops to Iraq..."

This minor tactical shift cannot be reasonably called a "change of strategy." And President Bush will not be able to commit additional troops to Baghdad if Congress refuses to provide the money for the additional deployment.

"Many listening tonight will ask why this effort will succeed when previous operations to secure Baghdad did not. Here are the differences: In earlier operations, Iraqi and American forces cleared many neighborhoods of terrorists and insurgents — but when our forces moved on to other targets, the killers returned. This time, we will have the force levels we need to hold the areas that have been cleared. In earlier operations, political and sectarian interference prevented Iraqi and American forces from going into neighborhoods that are home to those fueling the sectarian violence. This time, Iraqi and American forces will have a green light to enter these neighborhoods — and Prime Minister (Nouri al-)Maliki has pledged that political or sectarian interference will not be tolerated..."

Even if Maliki agrees in principle, there are serious questions whether U.S. forces will be provided this kind of cooperation. For example, high-ranking American officers have reported that radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's Al-Mahdi Army maintains a strong presence in the regular police force, including up to 90% of the 350,000 officers currently working in the north-eastern part of Baghdad. In addition, the Iranian-trained Badr Brigade dominates police commando units. Local police — primarily outside of Baghdad, but within the sprawling city as well — maintain a high degree of autonomy from the central government.

"This new strategy will not yield an immediate end to suicide bombings, assassinations, or IED attacks. Our enemies in Iraq will make every effort to ensure that our television screens are filled with images of death and suffering..."

This line appears to be an assertion that the violence is primarily designed to affect U.S. support for the War, thereby implying that Americans who recognize that things are getting worse instead of better are dupes of enemy propaganda. In

reality, the primary targets of these attacks are their victims, not American public opinion.

"Yet over time, we can expect to see Iraqi troops chasing down murderers, fewer brazen acts of terror, and growing trust and cooperation from Baghdad's residents. When this happens, daily life will improve, Iraqis will gain confidence in their leaders, and the government will have the breathing space it needs to make progress in other critical areas. Most of Iraq's Sunni and Shia want to live together in peace — and reducing the violence in Baghdad will help make reconciliation possible..."

## DEATHTRAP

BY JAMES CARROLL

"Who the hell is shooting at us?" a U.S. soldier yelled. His platoon was in a strife-torn part of Baghdad, teamed with an Iraqi Army unit. Gunfire was coming from all directions. "Who's shooting at us? Do we know who they are?"

My intention was to give readers a break from the war. How many ways are there to say no? But then I read the vivid *New York Times* account of that soldier's dilemma, and it took over the field of my concentration: "Whether the gunfire was coming from Sunni or Shiite insurgents or militia fighters or some of the Iraqi soldiers who had disappeared into the Gotham-like cityscape, no one could say." The confused battle was a foretaste of what President Bush's new war strategy entails, with American forces caught between enflamed antagonists, with uncertain allies. In Washington, equivocating politicians look for the least horrible way forward, but in Iraq, U.S. soldiers have been ordered into what increasingly shows itself as a deathtrap.

Two things fuel the nation's escalating anguish about this war. The first is the steady closing of the vise on American forces in Iraq. Despite the martial values of the U.S. fighters — their devotion to duty, their organizational competence, their raw courage — the actual combat situation worsens by the day. Their casualties mount, but the more dramatic measure of the chaos are the runaway numbers of Iraqi victims. The tribal savagery is feeding on itself now, an endless loop of violence to which the United States is increasingly irrelevant. Indeed, in one of the oddest reversals of the war, the American military presents occasions not of damage control, but of collateral damage. The bullets whizzing around the soldier in the *Times* story, originally meant for someone else, were aimed at him only because he was there.

At the same time, just by being in the streets to shoot at, our well-armed soldiers empower the gunmen on all sides. Perhaps the most destructive unintended consequence of American's lethal presence has been the way the lethal power of all belligerents has scaled up to match it. Our young people are surrounded now by killers united only in the will to kill them. Operation Deathtrap, exactly.

But anguish about the war is equally fueled by what is happening in Washington. After the State of the Union address, antiwar Republicans and Democrats began vying with each other over ways to challenge the Bush policy, even as Vice President Dick Cheney bluntly declared of congressional action, "It won't stop us." And sure enough, the Democrats and Republicans quickly tempered their opposition. The tough Capitol Hill talk of capping troop levels and setting timetables gave way to mere rhetoric, the function of which is to rescue the consciences of the war skeptics instead of rescuing the lives of the war fighters. While soldiers show astounding courage in conducting their missions impossible, politicians have stepped back from political risk to define their own options in ways that will justify policies of no real change. The war-disapproving resolution before the Senate will have no effect on operations in Iraq.

Cheney, in characteristic fashion, was the one to throw down the only gauntlet that matters. "The Congress has control over the purse strings," he said. "They have the right, obviously, if they want, to cut off funding. But in terms of this effort, the President has made his decision." Cheney is daring Congress to use the appropriations process as a way of challenging Bush's decision, knowing full well that Congress lacks the will to do so. Yet, as the administration looks for additional funds to launch its "surge," stopping the money is the obvious and simple way to go. Bush and Cheney will double their losing bet by pushing more young Americans into the pot, while the Congress restricts itself to kibitzing.

Critics charge that even incremental cuts in war funding — setting real caps and real timetables — would amount to abandonment of the troops. The answer to that charge comes from the troops themselves: "Who the hell is shooting at us?" To leave our soldiers in the deathtrap of Iraq is the true abandonment. They are being shot by Sunnis, Shiites, their Iraqi Army allies — and now, in a grievous failure of public morality, by feckless politicians in Washington.

James Carroll is a columnist for *The Boston Globe*, from which this has been reprinted.

Unfortunately, Iraq government forces are responsible for murder and terrorism themselves and have therefore lost the trust and cooperation of many of Baghdad's residents and alienated themselves from the population. U.S. forces — as is inevitable in urban counter-insurgency warfare situations — have also been responsible for thousands of civilian deaths and have often turned a blind eye to government-sponsored death squad activity. Indeed, it is the failure of U.S. forces and the forces of the U.S.-backed Iraqi government in Baghdad to provide the Iraqi people with basic security that has led many ordinary citizens, who would otherwise not identify with sectarian politics, to turn to sectarian extremist groups for protection.

"A successful strategy for Iraq goes beyond military operations. Ordinary Iraqi citizens must see that military operations are accompanied by visible improvements in their neighborhoods and communities. So America will hold the Iraqi government to the benchmarks it has announced..."

How the Iraqi government will be held to benchmarks is unclear. And how additional troops will make a difference in this regard is similarly dubious.

"To establish its authority, the Iraqi government plans to take responsibility for security in all of Iraq's provinces by November. To give every Iraqi citizen a stake in the country's economy, Iraq will pass legislation to share oil revenues among all Iraqis. To show that it is committed to delivering a better life, the Iraqi government will spend \$10 billion of its own money on reconstruction and infrastructure projects that will create new jobs..."

These are all reasonable objectives but there are serious questions as to whether the Iraqi government can follow through. Conversely, it inevitably raises questions about a government's independence when the President of the United States can confidently announce that its Parliament will pass certain legislation and spend a specific amount of money. Furthermore, the Iraqi government's budget is just over \$20 billion. It clearly does not have the capacity to increase reconstruction efforts in the magnitude the President suggests.

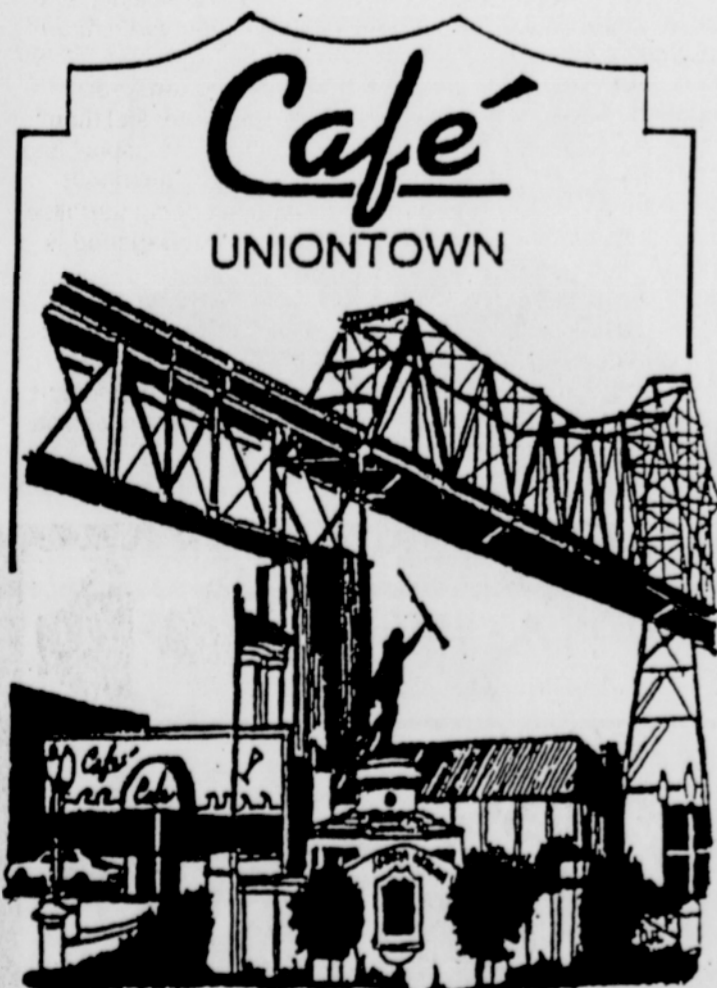
"To empower local leaders, Iraqis plan to hold provincial elections later this year..."

While some democratically elected local and provincial governments have been relatively responsible, others have become the personal fiefdoms of radical clerics and warlords who have done much to disempower the population.

"And to allow more Iraqis to reenter their nation's political life, the government will reform de-Baathification laws — and establish a fair process for considering amendments to Iraq's constitution..."

It was the U.S. government that initially imposed the overly broad de-Baathification laws, decimating the experienced government bureaucracy that had long been a bastion of secularism in the country. Assuming the United States has the power to change Iraqi laws, reversing some of these laws at this point may be too little too late, however. The Iraq government has packed government ministries with patronage posts based on sectarian, tribal, or political party affiliation. The ministries are rife with corruption and are unlikely to re-open themselves to qualified and experienced government workers from the previous regime. In addition, hundreds of thousands of former government workers and other educated Iraqis have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



218 WEST MARINE DRIVE  
ASTORIA, OREGON 97103  
(503) 325-8708



Ship Inn

Fish & Chips

Imported Beer on Tap

#1 on 2nd Street

Astoria \* 325-0033