

"We will use America's full diplomatic resources to rally support for Iraq from nations throughout the Middle East. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf States need to understand that an American defeat in Iraq would create a new sanctuary for extremists — and a strategic threat to their survival. These nations have a stake in a successful Iraq that is at peace with its neighbors — and they must step up their support for Iraq's unity government..."

If the U.S. purpose is really to promote democracy in Iraq, why is President Bush pushing for greater influence by these dictatorships, including the Islamic fundamentalist regime of Saudi Arabia? And are they really likely to even want to support an Iraqi government with such strong ideological ties with Iran or to support a continued U.S. military presence in the Middle East that is provoking extremist elements within their own countries?

"And on Friday, Secretary Rice will leave for the region — to build support for Iraq, and continue the urgent diplomacy required to help bring peace to the middle East..."

Given her track record up until this point, Rice will not likely do any better this time. The United States is not seen as an honest broker in the Middle East anymore. The Iraq Study Group's suggestion of bringing the regional players together would have a much greater chance for success.

"The challenge playing out across the broader Middle East is more than a military conflict. It is the decisive ideological struggle of our time. On one side are extremists who kill the innocent, and have declared their intention to destroy our way of life. In the long run, the most realistic way to protect the American people is to provide a hopeful alternative to the hateful ideology of the enemy — by advancing liberty across a troubled region. It is in the interests of the United States to stand with the brave men and women who are risking their lives to claim their freedom — and help them as they work to raise up just and hopeful societies across the Middle East..."

This obscene over-simplification ignores the fact that, as extremist as many opponents of the United States and its allies in the region may indeed be, the U.S. and most of its allies have hardly been paragons of freedom and moderation. The United States is the world's number one military, diplomatic, and economic supporter of dictatorial regimes in the Middle East that continue to deny their peoples basic freedoms. The United States also backs the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara, which deny those peoples their freedoms in flagrant violation of international law and a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions. Rather than provide a hopeful alternative, the United States has brought war, devastation, and chaos to Iraq and other countries in the region.

"From Afghanistan to Lebanon to the Palestinian Territories, millions of ordinary people are sick of the violence, and want a future of peace and opportunity for their children. And they are looking at Iraq. They want to know: Will America withdraw and yield the future of that country to the extremists — or will we stand with the Iraqis who have made the choice for freedom?..."

Through the large-scale U.S. bombing of Afghanistan, support for Israel's massive assaults on Lebanon, and support for Israel's ongoing occupation and repression in the Palestinian Territories, it is the United States that is largely responsible for the violence inflicted upon these nations. Poll after poll has indicated that the vast majority of the peoples of this region want the United States to get out of Iraq as soon as possible.



MATT WUERKER

Leaving Iraq does not mean yielding that country to extremists, nor does staying in Iraq back the cause of freedom.

"The changes I have outlined tonight are aimed at ensuring the survival of a young democracy that is fighting for its life in a part of the world of enormous importance to American security..."

It should be pretty obvious at this point, given the ongoing U.S. support for dictatorial regimes in neighboring countries, that the Bush administration does not particularly care about promoting democracy in the region. Indeed, the United States initially opposed free elections in Iraq after U.S. forces took over that country. As long as the government remains so dependent on the United States, it will never gain the credibility among the Iraqi people it needs for its survival.

"Let me be clear: The terrorists and insurgents in Iraq are without conscience, and they will make the year ahead

bloody and violent. Even if our new strategy works exactly as planned, deadly acts of violence will continue — and we must expect more Iraqi and American casualties. The question is whether our new strategy will bring us closer to success. I believe it will..."

Sending additional troops will just make the coming year even bloodier and more violent and will make success, by almost any definition even more elusive. This strategy will only embolden the extremist elements even more as reaction to the expanded U.S. occupation draws more and more angry young men (and possibly women) into their ranks. Much like the initial invasion of Iraq, increasing troops will result in strengthening Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida.

"Victory will not look like the ones our fathers and grandfathers achieved. There will be no surrender ceremony on the deck of a battleship. * But victory in Iraq will bring something new in the Arab world — a functioning democracy that polices its territory, upholds the rule of law, respects fundamental human liberties, and answers to its people. A democratic Iraq will not be perfect. But it will be a country that fights terrorists instead of harboring them — and it will help bring a future of peace and security for our children and grandchildren."

Most Iraqis and most Arabs indeed would like to see stable, accountable democratic governance that respects human rights and the rules of law. Of the scores of new democracies that have emerged throughout the world over the past three decades, however, the vast majority moved away from dictatorship and repression as a result of sustained nonviolent struggle by indigenous democratic civil society organizations. No new democracy has emerged as a result of a foreign invasion and occupation. It is hard to imagine how President Bush's proposals can improve the situation in Iraq even marginally. Twenty-five years ago, in justifying his Vietnam policy, President Richard Nixon promised the continued prosecution of the war would bring "a generation of peace." President Bush's similar claim is just as ingenious. It is no less than a rationalization for a failed imperial policy that has destroyed a nation that was no threat to us, drained our national treasury, damaged our international prestige and sent thousands of our finest young men and women home in body bags and with permanently debilitating injuries.

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"Editor's Note: The 'USS Missouri,' which signaled the end of World War 2 in 1945. 'Missouri' hosted 55,000 visitors when it stopped over in Astoria in the spring of 1998 on its way to Pearl Harbor from Bremerton, Washington, to join the sunken 'USS Arizona' as bookend memorials of the Pacific War's beginning and end.

CAN'T ANYONE IN CHARGE COUNT?

BY CHARLES A. HILLESTAD

The President is currently insisting after almost four years, 3000 dead troops, seven times that or more injured or maimed and a couple trillion dollars (counting equipment replacements, future medical costs and wasted infrastructure rebuilding) that we can still have "victory" or "mission accomplished" in Iraq by simply adding another 20,000 or so to the approximately 135,000 U.S. military already there. No wonder the investors lost money in all the companies Bush ran before fleeing to politics. He failed accounting.

In the first place, when I was in the military, the ratio out of all the military to those at the sharp end of the stick, in other words the "ground pounders" who go out and personally kick in doors of suspected enemy, was only about one in ten. The rest were clerk-typists, truck drivers, instructors, and the like. I am not disparaging them because those jobs needed to be done as well, but we need to focus on whether 20,000 uniformed bodies, even 20,000 frontline veterans who have already earned combat infantry badges, makes the slightest sense.

Let's assume, just for the sake of argument, that the giant, self-propelled bureaucracy known as the U.S. military has managed to cut the combat troop to support troop ratio in half by fanning out potato peeling, or counting those in high-risk MOSS (military occupation specialties) such as military policemen and combat engineers. That would still mean only about 10,000 additional armed door kickers are available to do the job.

Let's also assume that none of these get sick or are on leave, and that they are diligently out there beyond the perimeter kicking in doors 12 hours a day 7 days a week. That means at any given moment, only about 5000 are out and about at any one time. After all, they have to sleep and eat some portion of each day. That is about the number that attends a decent, but not championship, basketball game.

Now, 5000 looks like a lot crammed closely together in a stadium. But disburse them over a country the size of California and they become lost. That works out to about one pair of new boots on the ground for every 33 square miles of Iraq, or 277 troops per province.

Let's assume, however, that the 5000 are not scattered geographically. Logically, most would be concentrated where the people are, in the cities. Let's also assume that not a single one is put in the Kurdish areas, which still like us to a certain extent. Since there are (or were) 26,074,906 people in Iraq, not counting the new terrorists migrating there from elsewhere, and since up to about 20% of the population are Kurds, that means each proposed new trooper on patrol only has to suppress about 4000+ Iraqis. Even Custer faced better odds than that. You couldn't carry enough bullets per person to defend against them if they started mobbing.

Actually, to be fair, each new troop would not have to face 4000 hostiles. Since there are already about 135,000 U.S. military in Iraq (not all of which are door kickers of course, but most can shoot in self-defense), that would lower the odds. Still, very roughly, it is currently only one person in U.S. uniform per every 167 Iraqis. Adding another 20,000 targets for the Iraqis to shoot at doesn't help much.

According to public opinion polls, about 60% of Iraqis favor killing Americans in their country. Because that includes the Kurds, the percentage is presumably higher yet among the Shiite Muslims (who represent 60% of the population) and especially among the non-Kurd Sunni (who represent much of the balance and lost all their power once Saddam was gone).

The figure apparently rises to 8 or 9 out of 10 Iraqis who want us to leave, but let's ignore the ignoring of democratic opinion and concentrate just on the 6 out of 10 who openly want our troops dead. Bush proposes to increase the number of imbedded U.S. advisors with Iraq army units. Oh good, surround our boys (and girls) with armed Iraqis, 6 out of 10 who wouldn't mind if a bullet went astray in the heat of battle toward those same unpopular U.S. advisors/trainers. In Vietnam, unpopular officers got "fraggged." Will they be "Iraqed" in this new configuration?

Twenty thousand new troops, even quadruple that number, hardly seems adequate given the magnitude of the task. Would a million troops in Iraq be enough to bring "stability" and "democracy" to that country, especially given the previous disastrous policies we have pursuing? That would reduce the occupying army ratio to suppressed citizenry down to a more manageable 1 to 20 or so.

It would, of course, be insanity to contemplate such a "surge" in troop numbers, not to mention fiscal suicide. According to on-line encyclopedias, as of 2004, there were only 1,450,689 active duty personnel in all services including the Coast Guard. About 10% of the grand total is already in Iraq. The National Guard and Reserves are already stretched to the breaking point. To even add 20,000 more troops means many more soldiers (and indirectly their families) will have to risk third and fourth tours in a combat zone, something Bush himself was not willing to risk even once.

Bush has been granted an unprecedented *carte blanche* for two-thirds of his Presidency to use whatever he wanted in whatever way he wanted, supervised by whomever he wanted to pursue whatever ends he wanted. Everyone except Bush has known for years, however, that the existing number of troops is not enough to accomplish any legitimate objective (even assuming there was one to begin with).

It's time for some rigorous cost/benefit analysis. The question that must be asked now is whether it is even possible to add enough troops to accomplish anything. If not, then why the hell are we doing it? I'm no accountant, but it doesn't seem to add up.

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