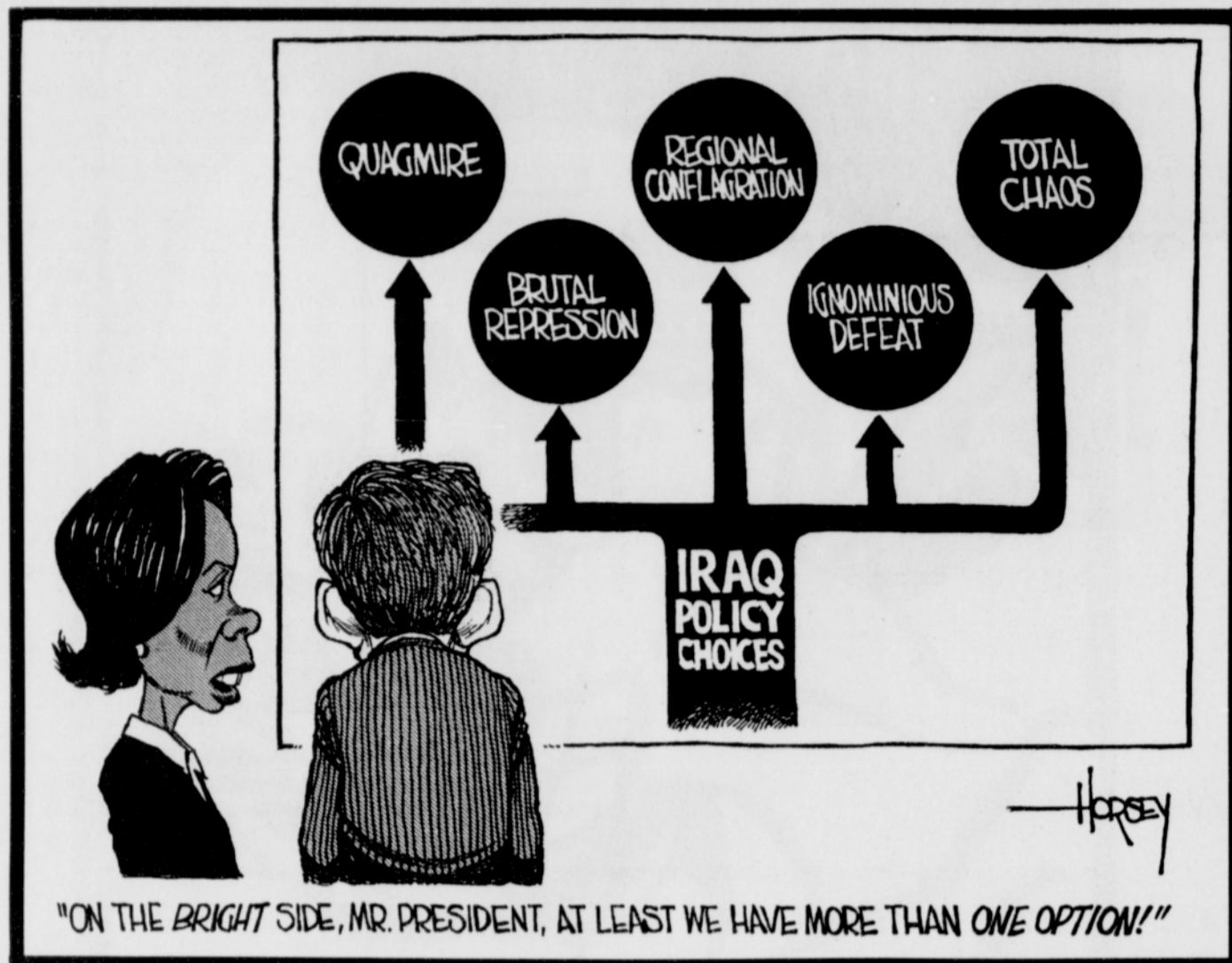


A 'DECISION TREE' FOR IRAQ POLICIES

ANALYZING WHAT COULD OR SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT IRAQ



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Possibly the most, certainly *one* of the most, pressing and divisive questions facing our country today is whether we should stay in Iraq or leave. If you believe the former, start with numbered paragraph 1 below for a way to ultimately determine whether that is a wise decision. If you believe the latter, start with numbered paragraph 8.

~1. The current policy being pursued by the President, in its essence, seems to be simply adding approximately 21,000 (+10,000 support) military personnel to the 135,000 or so already there and staying there for an indefinite period conducting training and counter "insurgency" activities. If you favor that idea or are at least willing to investigate it further, proceed to paragraph 2. Keep in mind that even if you initially trust the President or any other "decider" for that matter, that does not excuse you as a citizen from exercising judgment of the decision, particularly when it is a literally life and death result at stake.

~2. Begin with determining what are the potential benefits from the current "surge" policy as it is commonly called. Is it a prevention of civil war between one or more of the three Iraq religious factions? (That would be a good thing.) Is it an end to or at least substantial reduction of insurgency activities? An end to suicide bombers, kidnapping, mortar attacks and other terrorist activities in Iraq? Elimination of terrorist threats in allied countries? In America? Capture of Osama bin Laden? An end or at least substantial reduction of influence in predominantly Shiite Iraq by predominantly Shiite Iran and predominantly Shiite Syria or other countries? A stable and/or democratic government capable of defending itself and rebuilding Iraq? A stable and/or democratic government Middle Eastern region? Cheap oil? A permanent base for military and other operations in the region? Significantly improved admiration, respect and/or at least fear of the U.S. in Iraq or elsewhere? Prevention of nuclear weapons development by antagonist countries? Assuming there any genuine potential benefits from the course of action under investigation, proceed to paragraph 3.

~3. More important than the mere *possibility* of benefits is the question of how *likely* is it that each of the alleged benefits or goals will actually be accomplished by such a policy? It does not matter that we desire something in the abstract. Examples would be a perpetual motion machine or permanent peace in the ethnically and religiously divided Middle East. They are nice concepts, but not likely in our lifetimes, if at all. You should conduct a hard look to determine such likelihood. For some reason, that seems to be particularly difficult for Americans. Our particular view of history is that we always prevail regardless of what history has to say on the subject when closely examined. The fact that we are almost as likely to be eaten by a shark in Nebraska as win the big lottery does not seem to deter us from gambling. Nevertheless, it will not help if we continue acting on wishes, assumptions, hope, ideology, arrogance, pride, or misinformation. Review each of the supposed benefits as to the realistic probabilities they will happen when the policy being considered is carried out. Assuming you will ultimately conclude based upon real evidence that all, or perhaps any, of those proposed benefits are relatively likely if we continue pursuing the current White House policy, then skip to paragraph 6. If you are no longer as sure, proceed to paragraph 4.

~4. If 21,000 additional boots on the ground (+10,000 support), many to be "embedded" with Iraqi forces, are deemed by you to be insufficient to accomplish the desired goal, is there anything else that *might* achieve them? 100,000 troops? 1,000,000? Of course, if you start thinking that way, you must also answer the question of whether we have that many spare troops, especially the actual combat ones as opposed to support troops who typically outnumber ground pounders ten to one? Remember, we only count less than a million and a half military on active duty in the entire world at the moment. It is an easy confirmation on the internet with a Google or other search. So, do we need a draft? Factor in how long it will take to train them. Will other countries of the UN willingly supply all that is necessary? Do they want that oil for themselves? Would they take us down a peg or two? Are they courting some of the

other players such as Iran? Okay, how about then bringing in more pure mercenaries hired by our mercenary companies like Blackwater instead? Be sure to consider the effect, though, if they are not governed by our morals, ethics, or laws. Same issue on timing too. Can we train the new Iraqi troops to adequately do the job? If so, can we do so before the American voter runs out of patience, not to mention can such newly trained Iraqi soldiers stay loyal to a national government instead of sectarian groups? How will they be used? Will it matter if electricity, jobs, schools, and other infrastructure are not restored and remain secure? If the answer to any of the foregoing is no, how about splitting Iraq to separate the warring factions? Monetary bribes perhaps? To whom? Bigger rewards for bringing in villains? Given what we are already offering, do we have enough money in the Treasury? Are we likely to interest anyone in accepting if offered? Would more diplomacy work? That does not seem to have been tried. How about returning to a semblance of neutrality regarding Israel and Palestine issues? Sacrificing Israel? Everything is on the table for the purpose of analyzing alternative routes as to whether they would have any chance at success. Would that buy Iraqi friends? How about nuking Iran? Would that eliminate an enemy or just create new ones? How about permanent relocation or internment or maybe just outright genocide of one or more of the groups in Iraq? Offering the testicles of Bush and Cheney? Be creative. We are not discussing morality at this point but mere *feasibility*. Morality and legality are a second level for elimination of any particular alternative. Go to paragraph 5 now.

~5. If any likely new possibilities or alternate policies present themselves to you as potentially successful avenues for accomplishing the chosen goals you are articulating, then you can determine if they are permissible to be implemented. If they are still viable after consideration of applicable laws and still acceptable to you based on your morality and ethics, proceed to paragraph 6. If not, proceed to paragraph 8 (because at this point you have in essence concurred in a choice to leave rather than stay.)

~6. Assuming any of the proposed benefits are genuinely likely, what are they worth? Values must be assigned. Assigning values will be tough. For instance, how much is a live trained soldier worth versus a dead one? Be sure to count all the future earnings and children and happiness they could create if not killed or mangled in Iraq carrying out the President's current policy. It is tough, but not impossible to assign dollar values to human suffering. Courts and juries do all the time. For the moment, ignore the dead Iraqi citizens, even the women and children being constantly killed. That is a moral/legal question unless we are paying money to the relatives of the dead civilians as we do when it is a "friendly fire" situation. For the most part though, at the moment we are only discussing direct costs to American citizens either as treasury expenditures or lost opportunity costs. The bottom line is you are trying to decide the potential costs to achieve the stated goals and whether we can afford it. In addition to the obvious increase in deaths and wounds to our soldiers and treasury dollars going to Iraq, what about the costs to the active duty military in terms of morale, recruiting and readiness to respond to other crises? What about such costs to the National Guard and the Reserves, not to mention equipment replacement and retraining? What about costs to our economy, social programs, oil energy independence, global warming? What about the costs to civil liberties elsewhere? Civil liberties here? Those are a bit more

intangible, but still quantifiable to a certain extent in terms of dollars. Same for the adverse effect on our international credibility, prestige, trust and respect — whether or not other nations contribute to this and future causes and whether they agree to future proposed treaties such as NAFTA. Equally important, although again hard to put an exact dollar figure on, what will be the effect internally concerning credibility, prestige, trust and respect for American institutions such as the three branches of government and our two-party system? What will it do to our national morale and stalemates? How about our willingness to remain involved in international affairs? Will corruption and its fallout increase? Will prices go up? An atmosphere of hypocrisy, lack of honor or morals, might tend to increase government-spending losses and waste due to corruption for instance. Worse yet, are we increasing the number of those inclined to be terrorists? Will we further destabilize friendly or former friendly regimes in the area or elsewhere? Will moderation in tactics disappear? Will it make nuclear proliferation more likely — or more likely the use of these proliferated weapons against us? Are the increased number of spawned terrorists likely to ultimately attack the U.S. or just our offices and people abroad? What will be the costs of future 9/11s? How many can we afford? Ask the insurance industry. Ask the municipalities. Can we actually make our borders impregnable? How and at what expense? Again the effort should be to analyze *all* costs and consequences including the intangible ones. The analysis should be a sober one based on hard facts and figures to the extent possible, but add in some extra amounts as a contingency for the unknowns that usually are discovered too late and the unintended consequences that so often occur. Proceed to paragraph 7.

~7. What would happen if we are precipitously kicked out of town and opposed to an orderly withdrawal? Review the history books for a starting point. This step is to insure "Plan Bs" exist and that they too are analyzed. For instance, do we want to leave behind a large stockpile of modern weapons in the hands of those who don't like us as we did in Vietnam? Look what happened when we merely left Saddam's ammo dumps unguarded and that was relatively low-tech outdated stuff that could be used against us. What if our modern tank and smart-bomb arsenals are seized or left behind. Now, proceed to paragraph 9.

~8. If you believe leaving is the necessary or desired route, you must decide between a quick and a fast pullout. For each, you need to apply the same analysis as above regarding what are the potential benefits and their individual likelihood. The same for what are the respective costs and their respective likelihood. Presumably, pulling out earlier would result in less troop loss and less money spent than pulling out later. It is also presumed that pulling out would "embolden" the enemy and increase bombing here. These are all mere presumptions for discussion purposes, and more in depth determinations should be made to see if it actually does make a difference. Neither the dreaded "dominoes falling" nor increased terrorist attacks occurred here after the fall of South Vietnam. The Viet Cong certainly had the terrorist know-how to do so, but the end of the war was the end of aggression toward us. They were apparently too busy in other things. Would that be true of Iraq? Is the mere sight of our uniforms in Iraq inflammatory? Would they bother to travel to this country to continue blowing themselves up out of pure revenge or would they tend to be more occupied with rebuilding in a best-case scenario or destroying each other in a worst-case scenario? From the casualty counts, it is sure looking like they like to blow each other up more than us, at least at the moment. Perhaps some investigation should be made into whether the 9/11 attack was truly an attack on our "values" or merely to get us to "butt out" of an internal dispute in Saudi Arabia in which a rival faction wanted to diminish the ruling family's protector. (Don't forget the nationalities of Osama and most of the hijackers. Forgetting things like that can distort analysis.) We probably should have stayed in Saudi Arabia anyway, but the issue is the real motivation. After the same sort of analysis to determine first benefits of leaving and then costs, proceed to paragraph 9.

~9. As always should be done, compare the costs to the achievable benefits. Be liberal on the side of costs and conservative on the side of potential benefits. The goal is to achieve a cost/benefit ratio greater than 1. If the value of benefits does not exceed the costs, don't do it. Try another route. If all the choices generate a negative ratio result, proceed, with a heavy sigh, to paragraph 10.

~10. At one point in time, we had many options including to not invade Iraq at all. We are long past that point. Blame should be assigned and punishment enacted for any grossly incompetent or even criminal decisions that got us where we are, *but* merely because the only decisions left are excruciatingly painful ones does not excuse us from making a new decision, albeit one literally a "Hobbsian Choice." In any event, if the costs will exceed the potential benefits under every single alternative, then the last issue is comparing the various cost/benefit ratios to each other. If leaving is even marginally less a disaster than the disaster of staying, you are relegated to choosing the lesser of two evils. Could have beens, would have beens, no longer have a place. Reality must trump desire.

The foregoing is what is known as a "decision tree," albeit one with regrettably fewer and fewer branches available regarding Iraq. Utilization of decision trees is a common technique in business (and for many life choices as well whether recognized as such officially or not). The method is designed to maximize the return on the minimum investment or, in this case, to minimize the maximum losses, sometimes referred to as the MiniMax Principle.

What is not clear is whether any official presently in the White House has bothered to employ it regarding the thorny problem of Iraq. If they won't, you should. And, if you can't get those in charge to adopt the least costly alternative, then you need to consider how to best truncate those in charge and bud in their place someone who will. That decision too is amenable to scaling the branches of yet another decision tree.

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Mental Illnesses Are Brain Disorders

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