

Winning the War in Iraq
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The past weeks in Iraq have filled our news with numbers. 10 million Iraqis streaming to the polls to determine their future democratically. A new constitution, enshrining fundamental rights, approved across the country by a 4 to 1 margin. Two Sunni-dominated provinces dissenting. Over 2,000 Americans killed in action since the war began.

It's all being counted: the number of safe areas, daily attacks, billions spent per month, days left until the December 15 elections. And yet, as has been so often the case in Iraq, these numbers cannot indicate where that country is heading, because the figures themselves point in different directions. There is, at the same time, both great difficulty and great hope. And just as we'd be unwise to focus solely on the hopeful signs, so too would we be foolish merely to dwell upon the difficulties.

I mention this not because I seek to whitewash the situation in Iraq. On the contrary, not all is well there. But as we look on events there, let us not forget that the Iraqi people are in the midst of something unprecedented in their history.

The world has witnessed Iraqis of all stripes exercising those very democratic habits that critics predicted could never take root in a country with little democratic tradition. They voted in January for an interim government. They put Saddam on trial and dictators throughout the world on notice. They produced a landmark constitution that, while not perfect, nevertheless enshrines critical rights that go far beyond the standards elsewhere in the region. On October 15, they braved explicit death threats from Zarqawi and his ilk in order to determine their future democratically. Try as they might, the terrorists and the insurgents in Iraq got no veto. Instead, an Arab country adopted a democratic constitution by a free vote for the first time in history

Despite the daily bombings and attacks, the terrorists have not achieved their goals. They have failed to incite a civil war, because Kurds and Shia still have faith in the future and in American and Iraqi security efforts. The insurgents have not prevented Iraqis from joining the military and police, in

spite of horrific attacks at recruiting centers. Oil exports continue, despite concerted efforts at sabotage. And the insurgents have not stopped the political process, even while they assassinate government officials and attack polling places.

So while I would like to offer thoughts today about events in Iraq, the stakes for the United States, and current American policy, I do so remembering just how far the people there have come. With our help, the dictator who ruled their lives is gone from power, and with our aid the Iraqi people are establishing a true democracy. The Middle East will be forever changed by the choices we have made, and by those we continue to make over the next months. We must get Iraq right.

The Stakes

We must get Iraq right because America's stake in that conflict is enormous. All Americans, whether or not they supported American action to topple Saddam Hussein, must understand the profound implications of our presence there. Success or failure in Iraq is the transcendent issue for our foreign policy and our national security, for now and years to come. I would submit that the stakes are higher than in the Vietnam War.

There is an understandable desire, two and a half years after our invasion, to seek a quick and easy end to our intervention in Iraq. We see this in the protests of Cindy Sheehan; we saw it recently in Senator Kerry's call to withdraw troops whether or not the country is secured. But should America follow these calls, we would face consequences of the most serious nature. Because Iraqi forces are not yet capable of carrying out most security operations on their own, great bloodshed would occur if the main enforcer of government authority – coalition troops – draw down prematurely. If we were to leave, the most likely result would be full scale civil war.

When America toppled Saddam, we incurred a moral duty not to abandon the people there to terrorists and killers. If we withdraw prematurely, risking all-out civil war, we will have done precisely that. I can hardly imagine that any U.S. senator or any American leader would want our nation to suffer that moral stain.

And yet the implications of premature withdrawal from Iraq are not moral alone; they directly involve our national security. Instability in Iraq would

invite further Syrian and Iranian interference, bolstering the influence of two terror-sponsoring states firmly opposed to American policy. Iraq's neighbors – from Saudi Arabia to Israel to Turkey – would feel their own security eroding, and might be induced to act. This uncertain swirl of events would have a damaging impact on our ability to promote positive change in the Middle East, to say the least.

Withdrawing before there is a stable and legitimate Iraqi authority would turn Iraq into a failed state, in the heart of the Middle East. We have seen a failed state emerge after U.S. disengagement once before, and it cost us terribly. In pre-9/11 Afghanistan, terrorists found sanctuary to train and plan attacks with impunity. We know that there are today in Iraq terrorists who are planning attacks against Americans. We cannot make this fatal mistake twice.

If we leave Iraq prematurely, the jihadists will interpret the withdrawal as *their* great victory against *our* great power. Osama bin Laden and his followers believe that America is weak, unwilling to suffer casualties in battle. They drew that lesson from Lebanon in the 1980s and Somalia in the 1990s, and today they have their sights set squarely on Iraq. The recently released letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's lieutenant, to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, draws out the implications. The Zawahiri letter is predicated on the assumption that the United States will leave Iraq, and that al Qaeda's real game begins as soon as we abandon the country. In his missive, Zawahiri lays out a four stage plan – establish a caliphate in Iraq, extend the “jihad wave” to the secular countries neighboring Iraq, clash with Israel – none of which shall commence until the completion of stage one: *expel the Americans from Iraq*. Zawahiri observes that the collapse of American power in Vietnam, “and how they ran and left their agents,” suggests that “we must be ready starting now.”

We can't let them start, now or ever. We must stay in Iraq until the government there has a fully functioning security apparatus that can keep Zarqawi and his terrorists at bay, and ultimately defeat them. Some argue that it our very presence in Iraq that has created the insurgency, and that if we end the occupation, we end the insurgency. But in fact by ending military operations, we are likely to *empower* the insurgency. Zarqawi and others fight not just against foreign forces but also against the Shia, whom they believe to be infidels, and against all elements of the government. Sunni insurgents attack Kurds, Turcomans, Christians and other Iraqis, not

simply to end the American occupation but to recapture lost Sunni power. As AEI's Fredrick Kagan has written, these Sunni are not yet persuaded that violence is counterproductive; on the contrary, they believe the insurgency might lead to an improvement in their political situation. There is no reason to think that an American drawdown would extinguish these motivations to fight.

Because we cannot pull out and hope for the best, because we cannot withdraw and manage things from afar, because morality and our security compel it, we have to see this mission through to completion. Senator Kerry's call for the withdrawal of 20,000 American troops by year's end represents, I believe, a major step on the road to disaster. Drawdowns must be based on conditions in-country, not arbitrary deadlines rooted in our domestic politics.

The President and his advisors understand that, and I praise their resolve. They know that the consequences of failure are unacceptable and that the benefits of success in Iraq remain profound. And yet at the same time there is an undeniable sense that things are slipping – more violence on the ground, declining domestic support for the war, growing incantations among Americans that there is no end in sight. To build on what has been accomplished, and to win the war in Iraq, we need to make several significant policy changes.

Adopt a military counterinsurgency strategy. For most of the occupation, our military strategy was built around trying to secure the entirety of Iraq at the same time. With our current force structure and the power vacuum that persists in many areas, that is not possible today. In their attempt to secure all of Iraq, coalition forces engage in search and destroy operations to root out insurgent strongholds, with the aim of killing as many insurgents as possible. But our forces cannot hold the ground indefinitely, and when they move on to fight other battles, the insurgent ranks replenish and the strongholds fill again. Our troops must then reenter the same area and refight the same battle.

The example of Tal Afar is instructive. Coalition forces first fought in Tal Afar in September 2003, when the 101st Airborne Division took the city, then withdrew. Over the next year insurgents streamed back into the area, and in September 2004 Stryker brigades and Iraqi security forces went into Tal Afar again, chasing out insurgents again. They then left again, moving

on to fight insurgents in other locations. Then in September 2005, the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment swept into Tal Afar, killing insurgents while others retreated into the countryside. Most of our troops have already redeployed, and they may well be back again. The battles of Tal Afar, like those in other areas of Iraq, have become seasonal offensives, where success is measured most often by the number of insurgents captured and killed. But that's not success, and "sweeping and leaving" is not working.

Instead, we need to clear and stay. We can do this with a modified version of traditional counterinsurgency strategy. Dr. Andrew Krepinevich, AEI's Tom Donnelly and Gary Schmitt and others have written about this idea. Whether called the "ink blot," "oil spot," or "safe haven" strategy, it draws upon successful counterinsurgency efforts in the past. Rather than focusing on killing and capturing insurgents, we should emphasize protecting the local population, creating secure areas where insurgents find it difficult to operate. Our forces would begin by clearing areas, with heavy force if necessary, to establish a zone as free of insurgents as possible. The security forces can then cordon off the zone, establish constant patrols, by American and Iraqi military and police, to protect the population from insurgents and common crime, and arrest remaining insurgents as they are found.

In this newly secure environment, many of the things critical to winning in Iraq can take place – things that are not happening today. Massive reconstruction can go forward without fear of attack and sabotage. Political meetings and campaigning can take place in the open. Civil society can emerge. Intelligence improves, as it becomes increasingly safe for the population to provide tips to the security forces, knowing that they can do so without being threatened. The coalition must then act on this intelligence, increasing the speed at which it is transmitted to operational teams. Past practice has shown that "actionable intelligence" has a short shelf life, and the lag involved in communicating it to operators costs vital opportunities.

As these elements positively reinforce each other, the security forces then expand the territory under their control. We've done this successfully in Falluja. Coalition and Iraqi forces cleared the area of insurgents, held the city, and today Iraqi police and soldier patrol the streets, with support from two American battalions. And when the Iraqi forces are at a level sufficient to take over the patrolling responsibilities on their own, American troops can hand over the duties. Falluja today is not perfect, but our aim is not perfection – it is an improvement over the insecurity that plagues Iraq today.

This kind of a counterinsurgency strategy has some costs. Securing ever increasing parts of Iraq and preventing the emergence of new terrorist safe havens will require more troops and money. It will take time, probably years, and mean more American casualties. Those are terrible prices to pay. But with the stakes so high, I believe we must choose the strategy with the best chance of success. The Pentagon seems to be coming around on this, and top commanders profess to employ a version already. If we are on our way to adopting a true counterinsurgency strategy, that is wonderful, but it has not been the case thus far. After the recent operations in Tal Afar most American troops were redeployed from Tal Afar already, leaving behind Iraqi units with Americans embedded. I hope this will be sufficient to establish security there, but it is also clear that there has been no spike in reconstruction activity in that city.

To enhance our chances of success with this strategy, and enable our forces to hold as much territory as possible, we need more troops. For this reason, I believe that current ideas to effect a partial drawdown during 2006 are exactly wrong. While the U.S. and its partners are training Iraqi security forces at a furious pace, these Iraqis should supplement, not substitute for, the coalition forces on the ground. Instead of drawing down, we should be ramping up, with more civil-military soldiers, translators, and counterinsurgency operations teams. Our decisions about troop levels should be tied to the success or failure of our mission in Iraq, not to the number of Iraqi troops trained and equipped. And while we seek higher troop levels for Iraq, we should at last face facts and increase the standing size of the U.S. Army. It takes time to build a larger army, but had we done so even after our invasion of Iraq, our military would have more soldiers available for deployment now.

Knowing the enemy is the essential precondition to defeating him, and I believe our counterinsurgency strategy can do more to exploit divisions in the strands of the insurgency. Foreign jihadists, Baathist revanchists and Sunni discontents do not necessarily share tactics or goals. Recent Sunni participation in the constitutional process – and especially the decision by Sunni parties to contest parliamentary elections – present opportunities to split Sunnis from those whose only goal is death, destruction and chaos.

Keep senior officers in place. The Pentagon has adopted a policy of rotating our generals in and out of Iraq almost as frequently as it rotates the

troops. General Petraeus, a fine officer who was the military's foremost expert in the training of Iraqi security forces, now uses his hard earned experience and expertise at Fort Leavenworth. Others, including General Conway, General Odierno, and General Chiarelli, have been transferred to Washington or elsewhere. This is deeply unwise. If these were the best men for the task, they should still be on the job. These generals and other senior officers build, in their time in Iraq, the on-the-ground and institutional knowledge necessary to approach this conflict with wisdom. They know, for example, the difference between a battle in Falluja and one in Tal Afar, or what kind of patrols are most effective in Shia areas of Baghdad. We need these commanders – and their hard-won experience – to stay in place.

Integrate counterinsurgency efforts at senior levels. While it is critical to focus our military efforts on insurgents, particularly against Sunni fighters using violence to improve their political position, the non-military component is also essential. All Iraqis need to see a tangible improvement in their daily lives or support for the new government will slip. Sunnis need to feel that should they abandon violence once and for all, there will be some role in the political process for them. The Iraqi people must feel invested in a newly free, newly powerful and prosperous country at peace.

There is a role for each element of the U.S. Government in this, whether it implies aid, trade, wells, schools, training, or anything else. Ambassador Khalilzad has done a fine job at coordinating these efforts with the military campaign and the political process, but it needs to be done in Washington too. This should be the highest priority of the President's team, and must be managed by the most senior levels at the State Department, the Pentagon, the NSC, USAID, and any other agency that can contribute to the effort. To consign Iraq to the Pentagon to win or lose will simply not suffice.

In this regard, I am encouraged by Secretary Rice's recent testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee which laid out a more comprehensive, integrated political-military-economic strategy for Iraq. Implementing it is essential and will require a more formal interagency structure than we have seen to date.

Build loyalty in the armed forces. In building the Iraqi armed forces at a furious pace, the coalition and Iraqi authorities have invited former militia members to join. In the short run, it is most practical to do what we have

done thus far – swallow former militia units whole. But in the long run, we must keep our focus on building diversified individual military units.

The lesson of Afghanistan is instructive. There, the United States insisted – over initial objections from the Afghan Ministry of Defense – that each new military unit be carefully calibrated to include Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and others. This diversification *within* units serves three important functions: first, over time, it helps build loyalty to the central government; and second, it makes it more difficult for militias to reconstitute, should any decide to oppose the government. More broadly, the multiethnic Afghan National Army has provided a powerful psychological boost in a deeply divided country. Simply seeing Pashtuns and Tajiks and Uzbeks, in uniform and working together, has had a great impact on Afghan public opinion and the way Afghans imagine their country.

In Iraq the policy has been to recruit former militia members as individuals, rather than as units, but the reality has fallen short. Building units in this way is more difficult and will require more time than accepting homogenous Kurdish or Shia or Sunni units, for reasons of language, culture, and all-around expediency. But that is precisely why it is so important to do. Standing up the Iraqi army is about more than generating manpower so that American troops can withdraw. The composition and character of the force we leave behind will have social and political ramifications far beyond the military balance of power. In helping to build an army, in short, we are helping to build a new Iraq.

Pressure Syria. For too long, Syria has refused to crack down on Iraqi insurgents and foreign terrorists operating from its territory. President Assad said last month that his government distinguishes between those insurgents who attack Iraqis and the killers who attack American and British troops, which “is something different.” This is the same mindset that has led Syria to defy the United Nations over the assassination of Rafik Hariri, give sanctuary to Palestinian terrorist organizations, and attempt to maintain some hold on Lebanon.

With the meetings of the UN Security Council, the international community has an opportunity to apply real pressure on Syria to change its behavior on all these fronts. While multilateral sanctions keyed to Syrian cooperation with the Hariri investigation may be the starting point, it should not be the end. Any country that wishes to see the Iraqi people live in peace and

freedom should join in pressuring Syria to stop Iraqi and foreign terrorists from using its soil.

Win the homefront. While we make improvements in our political-military strategy, the latest polls and protests at home show that we need a renewed effort to win the homefront. If we can't retain the support of the American people, we will have lost this war as soundly as if our forces were defeated on the battlefield. A renewed effort at home starts with explaining precisely what is at stake in this war – not to alarm Americans, but so that they see the nature of this struggle for what it is. The President cannot do this alone. The media, so efficient in portraying the difficulties in Iraq, need to convey the *consequences* of success or failure there. Critics in the Democratic Party should outline precisely what *they* believe to be the stakes in this battle, if they are willing to suffer the consequences of withdrawal.

Another part of the effort includes avoiding rosy aspirations for near term improvements in Iraq's politics or security situation, and more accurately portraying events on the ground, even if they are negative. The American people have heard many times that the violence in Iraq will subside soon – when there is a transitional government in place, when Saddam is captured, when there are elections, when there is a constitution. Better, I believe, would be to describe the situation as it is – difficult right now, but not without progress and hope, and with a long, hard road ahead – and to announce that things have improved only when they in fact have.

Above all, winning the homefront means reiterating our commitment to victory and laying out a realistic game plan that will take America there. I believe that the vast majority of Americans, even those who did not support our initial invasion, wish to see us prevail. They are prepared to pay the human and financial costs of this war if – but only if – they believe our government is on a measurable path to victory. That we must give them. In this war as in all others, there are two fronts, the battlefield and the homefront, and we must tend to each.

The Road Ahead

Despite bombs, daily attacks, and untold threats against the democratic process, Iraq has held free elections, with open campaigns and a truly free press. Iraq has ratified the most progressive constitution in the Arab world and instilled justice in a country that for so long lacked it. Iraq has put

Saddam on trial and held his henchmen accountable for their murderous rule. In doing all these things and more, the Iraqi people have issued to their more peaceful, prosperous neighbors a profound challenge.

We have seen responses already in Lebanon's cedar revolution, Egypt's elections, and the Arab spring. As Iraq consolidates its democratic process, the challenge to its neighbors – and their necessary responses – will be starker still. The Iraqi people have shown their impulse toward democracy; they need security in order to hash out the many remaining differences that still divide them. They can get there, but they need our support.

Let me conclude by stating the obvious: America, Iraq and the world are better off with Saddam Hussein in prison rather than in power. Does anyone believe the stirrings of freedom in the region would exist if Saddam still ruled with an iron fist? Does anyone believe the region would be better off if Saddam were in power, using oil revenue to purchase political support? Does anyone believe meaningful sanctions would remain or that there would be any serious checks on Saddam's ambitions? The costs of this war have been high, especially for the over 2000 Americans, and their families, who have paid the ultimate price. But liberating Iraq was in our strategic and moral interests, and we must honor their sacrifice by seeing this mission through to victory.

Implementing the steps I have outlined here would not achieve victory in Iraq overnight – on the contrary. It will take more time, more commitment, and more support, and more brave Americans will lose their lives in the service of this great cause. And despite our cajoling, nagging, and pleading, few other countries around the world will share much of our burden. Iraq is for us to do, for us to win or lose, for us to suffer the consequences or share in the benefits. I began this speech by citing many numbers, and I could have cited many more. But in the end, there is only one United States of America, and it is to us that history will look for courage and commitment.