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Iraq and Roll: Get Out Now?

By Adam Lloyd

That persistent dripping sound you hear is the blood of American servicemen and women falling on Iraqi soil. Lately, the sound has been getting louder. Whether that blood is fertilizing the seeds of Middle Eastern democracy, as President Bush proclaims, or the growth of yet another hostile, fundamentalist Islamic theocracy, has yet to be seen. In either case, the ultimate success or failure of America's mission in Iraq will largely be determined by the steps the U.S. takes over the next several months.



Daily reports of car bombings, ambushes, and rocket attacks are taking their toll on the psyche of the American public, not to mention the lives of our soldiers. A legitimate question, then, is why not withdraw? With little evident support for the U.S. from the Iraqi people, the United Nations, or our NATO allies, why not just leave Iraq to its own devices and halt the human, political, and financial costs to the U.S.? America removed Saddam Hussein from power and freed the Iraqi people, accomplishments sufficient for the Bush administration to claim success and walk away with its head held high.

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Unfortunately, to do so would mean a disaster for America and the Middle East far surpassing that of the continued deaths of U.S. troops. There are five consequences, almost certain to occur, if America disengages from Iraq before a new government has secured its authority.

The first casualty of such a move will be the reputation and credibility of the United States. Within Iraq, America will, for the second time, have abandoned the supporters of Iraqi freedom, losing forever the small bit of trust that may eventually create a civil relationship between the two countries. Internationally, the U.S. will be seen as fickle and impotent, with not the resolve to withstand

the slightest of American casualties. No country will be able to count on America's word, support, or the promise that the U.S. will stand behind the values it espouses. Most dangerously, however, will be the horrific message that terrorism works; the mighty United States can be brought to its knees by the acts of a few dozen criminals.

Following this decimation of America's reputation and loss of international influence, the second imminent effect of an early U.S. withdrawal will be the bloody civil war for control over Iraq. The long repressed Shi'a majority, along with - but not necessarily allied with - the Kurds, will face off against their former Sunni oppressors. The brutal twenty year reign of Saddam Hussein's Sunni Baathist party will make this minority group a prime target for retribution and ethnic cleansing. Further clouding the picture is the possibility of international interference, with Syrian Baathists supporting Iraqi Sunnis while radical Islamists in Iran back the Iraqi Shi'a.

This is not to say that U.S. perseverance, or even successfully democratizing Iraq, will solve all of the issues facing the Middle East. To believe so is a dream.

War by proxy, however, may not satisfy Iran. Longtime enemies of the former Iraqi regime, and facing an erosion of power at home, Iranian leaders may view an invasion of their debilitated neighbor as the perfect opportunity to strengthen their own political position. In addition to settling old scores and distracting the growing anti-theocratic movement at home, if Iran were to take over Iraq, it would control 19% of the world's oil reserves, second only to Saudi Arabia.

Iran is not alone in its possible desire to send troops into Iraq. Turkey, too, may prove a threat to regional stability. The Kurdish population in northern Iraq has long held that the region extending out from the border with Turkey is land rightfully belonging to an independent Kurdistan. In the chaos left without an occupying American force, nor a strong central Iraqi government, anti-Turkish activity among the Kurds will inevitably increase. The Turkish government is very wary of the threat of a Kurdish insurgency, spurred on by Iraqi Kurds. Thus, either a preemptive occupation of this area by Turkey, or an invasion in response to Kurdish attacks, becomes yet another factor that comes into play if the U.S. shirks its obligation to Iraq. Were such an event to occur, the repercussions for the future unity of NATO could be devastating.

The final impact an early U.S. withdrawal from Iraq will have is the further delay of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. While I'm not a believer in this process to begin with, the added obstacles of losing America as a credible mediator and the resulting regional upheaval will doom all attempts at fashioning a peace, thereby damning both populations to continued violence and frustration.

Hovering over this entire mix lurks the specter of Saddam Hussein's, still unaccounted for, weapons of mass destruction. Desperate people rely on

desperate measures, and if these chemical and biological terrors do still exist, the complete deterioration of an Iraqi civil war is an ideal setting for these weapons to reemerge.

This is not to say that U.S. perseverance, or even successfully democratizing Iraq, will solve all of the issues facing the Middle East. To believe so is a dream. However, having become involved in this process, to leave it now would surely topple the region like a house of cards. Sadly, in this politically charged election year, we are already seeing signs that the Bush administration's will is weakening. Talk of accelerated troop reductions and the use of Iraqi militias as paramilitary forces are troubling signs that America has had its fill of Iraq and is ready to head home.

In the interim, America must show its resolve. For the sake of the Iraqi people, our own nation, and the world, it is our responsibility - our duty - to see this mission through.

Saddam Hussein's regime developed a culture of fear and bred an entire generation that knows nothing else. While the vast majority of Iraqis are glad for their liberation, they are, more than anything, still fearful. Capitalizing on this fear are a small group of desperate Saddam loyalists whose only hope is for America to abandon its resolve. They are counting on being able to cow the Iraqi people, and convince the American public that the costs of Iraqi freedom are too high. We know the contrary to be true.

So what is America to do? President Bush's best option, employing a U.S. lead multinational peacekeeping force, is currently out of the question, having bypassed the U.N. in the initial invasion of Iraq. Only after the 2004 election can he, or whomever is then president, claim the full support and strength of the American public. Wielding this reaffirmed - or new found - power, the president will then be in a better position to negotiate an agreement for allied support.

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Taking the offensive in rooting out and destroying Iraqi terrorist cells is a good start. Increasing our troop strength, while politically unpopular, is also necessary. The U.S. military must be able to insulate a burgeoning Iraqi government, law enforcement officers, and common citizens from the terror campaign. This cannot be done effectively at our current deployment size. Finally, a genuine effort must be made to include the Islamic clerics in the formation of a future government. Realistically, church and state will not be separate in Iraq, and provisions must be made for their productive integration rather than a combative, destabilizing opposition.

Yes, the flow of American blood will continue to be heard, each drop deafening in its sorrow, but that, sometimes, is the price of freedom and security. If America is to remain true to itself, we must fortify our resolve to meet our responsibilities and be prepared to bear the cost of success.



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