

Iraq: From a Strategic Standpoint,

We've Already Lost the Peace

**Strategic Anomalies, Denial,
Redoubling, and the Case for Withdrawing Now**

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In the wake of the recent upsurge in popular resistance in Iraq, and [the evidence of soaring hostility](#) among ordinary Iraqis and [Iraqi elites of all persuasions](#) toward the US-led occupation, **a growing number of seasoned US military professionals** are concluding that, from a strategic viewpoint, **the US is either just now losing the "Iraq Peace," or may have already lost it,** and should now focus its attention on **accelerating the withdrawal of Coalition Forces.**

This viewpoint, combined with harsh criticism of the "Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld/ Wolfowitz/neocon clique," is becoming more and more widespread among senior Pentagon officers and planners, though most are still reluctant to go on the record. It is also gaining ground with the American public at large, as noted below. But as in the case of the Vietnam War, the masses are way ahead of their "leaders."

Already, we've heard this revisionist view expressed in public by such Pentagon strategy heavyweights as former Reagan National Security Agency boss [General William C. Odom](#), Army Major General [Charles H. Swannack Jr.](#), Commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, and [Army Colonel Paul Hughes](#), who headed strategic planning for the Coalition Authority in Baghdad.

Even before the War, some senior officers, like [former Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki](#), had grave concerns about the feasibility of Rumsfeld's war plan. But those had to do mainly with resources and

tactics -- whether the plan provided for enough troops and heavy armor, and so forth.

In the last few months, however, the deepening concerns have shifted from tactics to strategy -- as in, **do we really have one?**

By this we mean:

- Does the US have a **clear "definition of victory"** and a long-term strategy for accomplishing it? Are these the same goals that it has announced publicly, or are there others? Is it now just floundering reactively from crisis to crisis, wishfully hoping that things will somehow work out, while getting locked in to a vicious cycle of anti-Americanism and violence? Even worse, as in the case of Vietnam, are US leaders just staying the course and sacrificing lives mainly for domestic political reasons, or because the US fears **appearing** to have been "defeated?"
- Were the **initial goals realistic**, not only in terms of military might, but also political, economic, diplomatic, and moral capital? Has the US reached the point where -- as in Vietnam in 1967-68 -- the original **goals** of the war are no longer feasible, without unacceptable US involvement, costs or behavior?
- What are the **real long-term costs** of the current strategy likely to be, in terms of both "direct" and "opportunity" costs, and costs to credibility, image, and international relationships, as well as human and cash costs? Were these costs underestimated by the war's planners?
- What impact is this war having on **other fronts** in the war on terrorism? Has it become a costly distraction? Is it actually helping the terrorist cause, by providing a rallying point, an enticing opportunity to strike at US troops and foster internal divisions in Iraq, and a new source of armaments? If the US withdraws now, would that strengthen or weaken global terrorism?
- Will a continued substantial US military presence in Iraq actually be an obstacle to **peace and security**, and a source of

increased religious and ethnic polarization in Iraq and the Middle East in general?

- Rather than announce increased, prolonged US troop commitments, isn't this the time for the US to announce a **specific schedule for a US troop withdrawal**, perhaps contingent on a ceasefire?

As we'll see below, the overall answer is that a fundamental Iraq strategy rethink is overdue. We need to take into account the many "anomalies" that we've discovered in the last year, which have fundamentally undermined the original strategy behind the War.

As usual, however, when policymakers find their pet strategies challenged by such anomalies, their first response is usually to dig in.

In the case of the Vietnam War, for example, most top Democrats and many Republican leaders had already agreed by the end of 1968 -- in private, at least -- that no "strategic victory" was feasible in Vietnam at an acceptable price, and that a US withdrawal was indicated.

Shamefully, largely for reasons of cosmetics, the war was continued and indeed even expanded during the next four years. At the time, both President Johnson and President Nixon were both terribly concerned about "peace with honor" -- the country's appearing "weak" before the supposedly unified global Communist menace. So it took from 1968 until March 1973 for the last US combat troops to leave the country. And it took two more years after that for the inevitable reunification of the artificial US creations, "North" and "South" Vietnam. Today, of course, "Communist" Vietnam is known mainly as a worthy supplier of shrimp and coffee, and a hefty World Bank client.

As Senator John Kerry of all people must remember, those four extra years cost an additional [21,000 American lives](#), plus over 1.5 million extra Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian lives. For what? Indeed, as **Henry Kissinger** himself admitted in a [2001 interview](#) with documentary filmmaker Stephen Talbot, when asked about what difference it would have made if Vietnam had gone Communist right after World War II,

"Wouldn't have mattered very much. If the Vietnam domino had fallen then, no great loss."

So, according to this premier American national security strategist, in retrospect, 58,000 Americans and 3 million Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians basically died for nothing. But now we're expected to sit on our hands while yet another **cockamamie Pentagon war plan** chews up thousands of innocent lives.

DENY AND REDOUBLE

Unfortunately, the first response to **strategic anomalies** is usually a **denial (or reinterpretation)** of the new evidence, followed by a **redoubling of efforts** to make the tired old strategies work.

Where, as here, senior politicians who are also running for office are in charge, these tendencies are reinforced, since they fear being branded by their opponents as "inconsistent." As in Vietnam, the result could easily be over-commitment to a pipedream, ending in an eventual forced withdrawal that is much more costly than it needed to be -- and yet another young generation of Americans that never quite views their country in the same way.

Despite all this, you wouldn't guess from our President or his Democratic challenger that the US is facing any **strategic** crisis whatsoever in Iraq.

Both major parties' senior politicians and bosses are stuck like deer in the headlights, committed to the same pro-war strategies they **all** supported last year, as if nothing has been learned since then. Locked in a tight contest, both candidates are running toward the center of the field at full speed, and not paying much attention to the new hard facts on the ground.

Indeed, **Senator Kerry**, **Bush**, Senator Clinton, Senator Lieberman, and almost all leading Democrats appear to be in violent agreement about the Iraq War, except about picayune tactical details. **Consistent with the "denial/redouble" pattern**, **all** of these "leaders" are also now calling for a **significant expansion** of US troop commitments in Iraq.

In Bush's estimates, this would require at least 135,000 to 160,000 US troops in Iraq at least through 2006. But there is no reason to expect that only two more years would be enough, if the current strategy is continued. Indeed, as discussed below, the Pentagon is already proceeding with a little-noticed plan to build **14 permanent US military bases** in Iraq.

All of them, including Bush, now also support some kind of increased role for the UN in Iraq, as if that were feasible without a substantial improvement in the security situation -- which requires, in turn either a "US victory" that looks increasingly unlikely, or a US withdrawal.

All this implies a substantial increase over the \$175 billion that the US has already spent in Iraq -- Bush's latest \$25 billion supplemental budget request is consistent with an annual "run rate" of at least \$50-\$60 billion a year. If recent casualty rates are any indication, this also implies at least another 1500-2000 US war dead through 2006, and probably 5-6 times that many US wounded, not to mention thousands more Iraqi dead and wounded, including many civilians.

In Senator Kerry's case, this lack of leadership is especially disappointing. One might have hoped that he would have learned something about the costs of dead-end wars from the VVAW, if not from his four months in Vietnam.

PLUMMETING SUPPORT FOR THE WAR

According to the latest USA Today national poll, taken May 10, 2004, in the wake of the disgusting Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal, for the first time since the initiation of the war in March 2003, over [half of Americans](#) -- 54 percent -- now believe that it was a "mistake" to send US troops to Iraq. This is a dramatic turnaround in less than six months -- and, interestingly, a much faster erosion of support for this war than occurred during the Vietnam period.

Fully 29 percent now believe that all US troops should be withdrawn now, up from just 16 percent in January, and another 18 percent believe that some troops should be withdrawn. At least 75 percent oppose expanding the number of US troops in Iraq.

Despite this, as noted earlier, this is still the official position of both President Bush and John Kerry, and almost all other leading

Republicans and Democrats politicians. As in the case of the Vietnam War, the unwashed masses are far ahead of the "leaders."

At the moment, indeed, the only candidate who supports an immediate (six month) withdrawal from Iraq is the stubborn 70-year old Green Party candidate, **Ralph Nader**. Many Democrats still vehemently (and incorrectly) still believe that he was the "spoiler" for a Democratic victory in the 2000 Presidential election. Whatever we may think about his candidacy, the fact is that at the moment, he is our only Robert Kennedy. To his great credit, Ralph has opposed this "preemptive war on a defenseless country" since the start, and is now advocating a [withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq within six months](#).

As the most recent polls show, Nader's opposition to the Iraq War has given him a burst to 5 percent in the May 10th polls. Perhaps Kerry could take a few lessons from Ralph with respect to his position on the war. For the same poll that showed American support for the war plummeting, and Bush's approval dropping from 52 percent in mid-April and 49 percent in early May to just 46 percent this week, also found Kerry **dropping** two full points, and losing to President Bush, 47-45, among likely voters. Meanwhile, Ralph gained two points, to 5 percent among likely voters.

Of course this is just one national poll, but if Kerry really wants to win in November, he'd better think about the implications of his me-too position on the war -- the main source of public dissatisfaction with Bush. As one analyst has suggested, he might even consider cutting a deal with Nader, getting Ralph to appoint the same list of Presidential electors as Kerry, in exchange for permitting him to get on the ballot in 50 states. He might also consider adopting Ralph's more popular position on the war, as well that of the [National Council of Churches proposal](#), which has also just recommended withdrawing and turning over control in Iraq to the UN.

Oddly enough, this situation also gives President Bush an incredible opportunity. If he really wanted to insure his victory over Kerry, the **smooth move might be for President Bush to reverse course** and announce plans for a definite US withdrawal. If the polls are any indication, this "win by losing" approach to fixing Iraq would very popular with the American people -- especially those who are wavering in the center. It would also be popular with many Bush supporters on the right, who fear that aggressive nation-building in Iraq may jeopardize other vital concerns on their agenda -- like gay marriage, abortion rights, more tax cuts, new Supreme Court judges.

However, Bush, like Kerry, **also** seems determined to dig himself in even deeper on Iraq. This is what he did just this week by [unnecessarily backing Secretary Rumsfeld in](#) the Abu Ghraib scandal, despite the many calls from right and left alike for the Secretary's resignation.

STRATEGIC ANOMALIES - "REALITY CHECK, PLEASE!"

Meanwhile, as we've just learned in the towns of Falluja and [Najaf](#), an aggressive US military presence may just lead to increased hostility. This is only one of many "strategy anomalies" that the war's architects -- Democrats, Republicans, and Blair's Laborites in the UK as well -- have encountered. There are many others. Most are already familiar to those who have followed recent events. But it is worth restating them, just to put the case in order.

1. Iraq's WMD Threat. Of course the first basic assumption, declared innumerable times in the fall of 2002 and early 2003 by US and UK officials during the run-up to the war, was that Saddam's Iraq posed a grave threat to the US and its allies. Either it already possessed WMDs and the means to deliver them, or was actively attempting to acquire them.

A key related assumption was that this threat could only be removed by an immediate US invasion. The UN weapons inspection program, according to the war's supporters, had been a failure.

Reality Check, Please: Of course no WMD stockpiles or serious WMD programs have been found, after months of searching by thousands of highly-trained US and UK personnel.

It also now appears that the UN weapons inspection programs was in fact **very successful** at identifying whatever WMD programs Saddam had, and getting him to curtailing them. For all its imperfections, the UN approach worked.

Indeed, if, as France, Germany, and Russia proposed, weapons inspection had been permitted to continue, the war might have been avoided completely, or, at worst, eventually proceeded with better preparations and much broader multilateral support, as in the 1991 Gulf War.

That, in turn, would have meant less US influence over post-war Iraq (as in military bases and oil). But the costs to the US and Iraq would

have been much lower, and the transition to peace and a new representative government much smoother and less violent.

2. Iraq's Role in Supporting Terrorism (Pre-War). The second key strategic premise for the war was that Saddam's Iraq was aiding al-Qaeda and other global "terrorist" groups.

Reality Check, Please: In fact one of the few bona fide pre-war "terrorists" who was living in Saddam's Iraq turned out to be the aging [Abu Nidal](#), who had been inactive since the mid-1980s. Abu Nidal was reportedly suffering from leukemia, but he died of multiple gunshot wounds in Baghdad in August 2002, long before the invasion -- perhaps the victim of an [attempt by Saddam to head it off](#).

The only other "terrorist group" operating in Iraq before the war was **Anwar al-Islam**, which was located in northern Iraq in the "no-fly" zone, outside Saddam's control. Its headquarters could easily have been bombed at any time. But the US chose to wait until after the war started, so that it could say that it actually destroyed some terrorists.

Beyond this, no definitive pre-war links between Saddam and al-Qaeda have ever been established. As former Bush Administration counter-terrorism czar [Richard Clarke](#) and [many other experts](#) have long argued, Saddam and al-Qaeda were, if anything, antagonists, and even if he had had WMDs, Saddam was not about to share control over WMDs with a radical like Bin Laden.

The US also [made much](#) of the alleged medical refuge that Saddam allowed a Jordanian sympathizer, **Abu Musab al-Zarqawi**. The US claimed that Zarqawi had links to al-Qaeda. But in fact it seems that his organization, al-Tawhid, was actually [a rival to al-Qaeda before the war](#), focused on overthrowing Jordan's King Abdullah. Of course Zarqawi's influence in Iraq does appear to have been [strengthened](#) by the US invasion.

3. Iraq's Role in Supporting "Terrorism" (Post-War). Whatever the details of Saddam's links to global terrorism were before the War, it was assumed by the war's supporters that the invasion would reduce Iraq's role in global terrorism.

Reality Check, Please: In fact just the opposite has occurred. Since the invasion, Iraq has actually become a **terrorist Mecca**, with anti-US fighters from all over the Muslim world pouring into the country across

its [now-wide-open borders](#), eager to kill Americans. They have no need to bring automatic weapons, grenade launchers, mines, or explosives. Saddam's huge stockpiles of these ordinary weapons have been very [poorly secured](#) by the under-manned Coalition Army. And arms have also reportedly been for sale from the new Iraqi police force.

So, as Bin Laden's most recent [recorded messages have made clear](#), far from being a "defeat for terrorism," the Iraq War has actually been something of a boon -- rather like the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan ultimately proved to be. The Soviets, we recall, lasted nearly 10 years in Afghanistan, at a cost of more than 15,000 Soviet lives and hundreds of thousands of Afghanis. The US is of course vastly more powerful than the Soviet Union. And, unlike that situation, there is no foreign aid available to the Iraqi resistance. Still, as noted earlier, such aid may not be necessary here. And the US is already well on its way to keeping pace with the Soviet casualty count.

Not only has the Iraq War provided opportunities for young radicals to secure weapons and attack Americans close at hand. It may have also distracted some resources from the hunt for other terrorist organizations. Most important, it has antagonized the whole Muslim world, providing the radical factions a wonderful opportunity to recruit new supporters.

4. Iraq's Warm Welcome for US "Liberators" The US also assumed that we would get a warm reception from Iraqis, as "liberators" of Saddam's Iraq.

The US war planners also assumed that Iraqi nationalism was weak, and that and resistance would disappear after Saddam and his "dead-ender" henchman were gone. They defined "victory" as the removal of Saddam and his Ba'athist regime. They also assumed that the Iraqi Shiite and Sunni communities were fundamentally at odds, and that there would be little opposition to the Coalition Forces outside the so-called "Sunni Triangle."

Reality Check, Please: The US invasion created a wave of genuine nationalism that spans Sunni and Shiite community lines and helped to unite radical factions in each against the "occupiers," as they united in their 1920 revolt against the British. The sharpest fighting in Iraq has taken place in just the last month, long after [Saddam and all but ten](#)

of the other 55 "most wanted" Ba'athist leaders were killed or captured.

Furthermore, just 17% of all Sunnis live in the so-called "Sunni Triangle" north of Baghdad -- Iraq's Sunni and Shiite communities have historically been much closer than in other Muslim countries. Indeed, one key challenge faced by "foreign fighters" like Zarqawi has been to try and divide them. In the wake of the continued US occupation, the US has experienced growing armed resistance from Shiites and Sunnis alike, as exemplified by the May 10 US strikes [against the Shiite leader al-Sadr's headquarters](#) in Baghdad. While the vast majority of Iraqis are still watching the battle from the sidelines, a majority also now supports [an end to the US occupation](#), believe that Coalition Forces have conducted themselves badly, and believe that the Coalition will not withdraw until forced to do so.

In this situation, destroying the Ba'athist Party turns to have been insufficient for a return to peace and security. Nor, given the importance of "ordinary" former Ba'ath Party members in the educational system, the civil service, and the police, was it a necessary condition. It was, in fact, just a dumb move taken by Paul Bremer in the early days of the occupation, under pressure from Chalabi's INC, and recently reversed.

5. "Liberators" Vs. "Occupiers" The pro-war strategists also assumed that thousands of US and UK troops could be counted on to conduct themselves in Iraq as proper "liberators."

Reality Check, Please: The grim reality is that the US and UK forces have hardly distinguished themselves as "liberators." Rather, they were rushed into duty without adequate training or acculturation, with few skills in Arabic. They had also been encouraged from the top of the Bush Administration on down to believe that Iraqis had something to do with 9/11. As a result, many of our troops have behaved very badly toward ordinary Iraqis -- like crude, rude barbarians. As the events at Abu Ghraib prison have dramatized, there have been widespread human rights violations, ethnic slurs, religious slights, and indignities to Iraqi women. The result has been **yet another public relations debacle for the Coalition Forces.**

6. Iraq's Support for "Acceptable" Democracy. Yet another key strategic assumption was that in a relatively short time, the Coalition

and its Iraqi allies would be able to lay the foundations for an "acceptable" democratic system.

In the US vision, this would be one that would be (a) reasonably representative, (b) able to avoid the kind of popular theocracy that has characterized Iran, (c) pro-US and at least neutral towards Israel, (d) able to maintain a unified federal system, including the Kurds, and, of course, (e) be willing to go along with other key "imperial" requirements, like permission to build 14 long-term US military bases in the country, the use of oil revenue to defray the invasion's costs, and the opening of Iraq's oil resources to foreign investors like ExxonMobil and BP.

Reality Check, Please: In fact it has been impossible to square all these various requirements with each other. As of April 2004, after a year of occupation, while 82 percent of Iraqis [still support "democracy" in the abstract](#), outside Kurdistan, most Sunnis as well as Shiites are also opposed to a rigid separation between church and state. There is, at this late date, still no complete draft constitution that the various key interest groups in the Coalition-appointed Iraqi Governing Council Constitution have been able to agree on.

Ordinary Iraqis, it turns out, are also highly critical of the US, the UK and Israel. They are also highly critical of the **Iraqi Governing Council** created by the Coalition Forces, which is widely viewed as a puppet government. As the Shiite leader Sistani has said, "We want elections as soon as possible."

Finally, Kurdistan, the one part of the country that is now stable and enjoying economic recovery, also strongly favors complete independence, not federation. Since Kurdistan is one of Iraq's richest provinces -- the original source of much of its oil -- the rest of Iraq is determined to prevent this. As if we needed one, this issue provides another potential source of conflict. The whole country is a bubbling cauldron of such regional, ethnic, tribal, religious, and anti-foreigner feelings, and we have turned up the fire.

7. Reestablishing Security/ Avoiding a Military Draft. Yet another key strategic assumption was that it would be relatively easy to reestablish security with a "politically acceptable" commitment of less than 150,000 Coalition troops. This force level was supposed to diminish over the year, complemented by a large number of private security contractors.

This was supposed to be feasible, despite Bremer's disbanding of the entire pre-existing Ba'athist police and military structure, the fact that Saddam had emptied his prisons of all criminals prior to the invasion, and the fact that Coalition troops had little training in policing, crowd control, or non-lethal weaponry.

One implication was that the US and UK troops expected to rotate home on regular schedules, without undue burdens on their families and morale.

Another was that a new Iraqi national police force would be able to provide an adequate substitute for the Coalition's policing activities.

A third was that military forces from other countries, or the UN, might also become available to back-stop US and UK troop commitments, as the security situation stabilized.

Reality Check, Please: All these assumptions about security have proved false. Almost incredibly, the US military repeated the **same exact mistake that was made in Haiti** during the 1990s. The complete disbanding of Iraq's military, with no **adequate substitute**, played a key role in the initial looting that occurred in Baghdad in April, 2003, and the general crime wave and insecurity, especially in Baghdad, that has continued ever since.

It also turned out to be much harder than expected to "train up" an Iraqi police force willing to stand and fight (for what? the unelected IGC?) As the Iraqi resistance became more violent, this problem escalated, to the point where, during the recent turmoil in Falluja, more than 50% of the new police force graduates defected or disappeared into the crowds.

The continuing security problem, in turn, scared many private contractors out of the country, and jeopardized the whole schedule for Iraqi reconstruction, which has basically ground to a halt. The exposed yet another dubious assumption by the war planners -- the decision to rely so heavily on [private contractors](#) for security services and reconstruction.

The security crisis has also prolonged service terms for US troops, and led many of them to be given assignments to "policing functions" for which they were never trained. That, in turn, led to even great frustration among US troops -- more than 40,000 of whom are members of the US Army Reserves or National Guard. This encouraged

increased hostility among Americans and Iraqis, many of whom are now viewed as "criminals who hate us."

The resulting morale problems have caused US Army Reserve and National Guard enlistment and reenlistment rates, as well as regular military enlistment rates, to plummet to 30 year lows. Another byproduct of the continuing security nightmare is that it has been very difficult to get other countries, or the UN, to maintain, much less expand, their troop commitments.

If Iraq's security situation continues to demand increased Coalition troop commitments, and reenlistment/ enlistment rates don't improve, some observers have even speculated that the US might be forced to reintroduce a military draft. For the moment this appears unlikely, unless some new "front" opens up in Syria, Iran, or North Korea. But those of us with college-age children take no comfort from the fact that several members of Congress have already introduced the [necessary legislation](#).

8. Modest, or At Least "Acceptable," Costs. The last key assumption was that this whole effort could be mounted at a relatively modest, or at least politically-acceptable cost, not only in terms of direct financial costs, but also human lives, and "opportunity costs" as well.

Evidently it was assumed by some planners -- [Assistant Defense Secretary Wolfowitz, for example](#) -- that Iraq's oil production would resume quickly enough to let it make a substantial contribution to funding the costs of the War. It was also assumed that, as indicated earlier, security would improve rapidly after Saddam's demise, and that the new Iraqi police force would be able to substitute for US troops, at a fraction of their cost. Finally, the super-optimists in the pro-war camp may have even assumed that part of the War's freight would be paid by other UN members, even though the Security Council was never permitted to rule on the final decision to go to war.

Reality Check, Please: The reality is that, just one year in, the Iraq War is a budget-buster, both in terms of cash and lives.

The Pentagon's cost accounting for this effort is [inscrutable](#) -- perhaps intentionally so, although it is never easy to know precisely what fraction of, say, a hospital in Frankfurt or "wear and tear" on a particular aircraft is properly assignable to a specific front. However, most estimates put the "sunk cost" to date of the Iraq venture at

about \$175-\$180 billion, including the current interest on this spending, since all of it has to be deficit financed.

Going forward, there is now a continuing "run rate" of about \$5 billion per month. In terms of real dollars, this is **close to the peak \$5.1 billion** per month run rate for the Vietnam War. These numbers omit the costs incurred by the UK and other Coalition members, which have supplied about twenty percent of the troops.

Nor is Iraqi oil production anywhere close to covering these financial costs. Indeed, production has still not recovered to its pre-War levels, and the cost of **securing Iraqi oil** exports against increasing sabotage attempts is [eating up almost all the profits](#).

Coalition casualties have also been much greater than expected. As of May 10, after 13 months of combat, the Coalition has sustained a total of [881 combat fatalities and approximately 4716 wounded](#), assuming that US "dead to wounded" ratios also apply to non-US Coalition Forces.

While these totals are well below those sustained during the peak years of the Vietnam War -- 1967-69 -- they are far greater than those sustained during [the first three years of that War, 1961-64](#), and **comparable** to the [losses sustained by the US in 1965](#), the first big year of the Vietnam War, allowing for improved survival rates because of improved body armor and "just-in-time" medicine.

As for the Iraqis, officially, our "new Pentagon" no longer keeps track of "enemy body counts" much less civilians -- one major way in which Vietnam was indeed different, at least for PR purposes.

However, efforts have been made by some observers to keep track of [Iraqi civilian fatalities reported in the press](#). While these statistics are probably an understatement, they indicate **at least 9,016 to 10,918 Iraqi civilian deaths** through April 24, 2004.

In addition, of course, there have also been at least 4-5 times this number of civilians wounded. In a country with a population of 25 million, this is quite a blow. For the 80 percent that is Arab, and has suffered almost all the casualties, this would be **comparable, in US terms, to a loss of 100,000 dead and 600,000 wounded**. Assuming that the average Arab family in Iraq has four members, that each family member knows 10 people, and each of these 10 people also knows 10 people, **the entire Arab population of Iraq is within**

"two degrees of separation" of experiencing these losses personally.

Is it any wonder that we have already lost the peace?

LONGER-TERM COSTS

But the **real long-term costs of this war** are even higher.

Far from striking a decisive blow for "democracy and liberation" in the Middle East, and setting an example for other Arab countries to follow, this war has become a lightning rod for anti-Americanism, and a textbook example of hegemony run amok.

Far from teaching the world to respect and admire America's newfound power, our global reputation has plummeted to an all-time low.

The citizens of other countries that have practiced imperialism against their neighbors or their own peoples know what it feels like to be despised and hated whenever they travel. Americans are not used to this treatment. As a direct result of this war, as well as our other policies in the Middle East and elsewhere, we are going to have to [get used to it](#).

Far from providing the world an inspiring example of our truthfulness and honor, the way in which the case was made for this war, and the way it has been conducted, have severely damaged our nation's credibility.

THE CASE FOR WITHDRAWING NOW

Few Americans doubt that we will **someday** withdraw all US troops from Iraq, as we did from Vietnam.

Probably most of them are not aware that, unlike in Vietnam, the Pentagon's military engineers are already hard at work designing and constructing [14 enduring" military bases all over the country](#), in Baghdad, Mosul, Taji, Balad, Kirkuk, and near Nasiriyah, Tikrit, Fallujah, Irbil, and elsewhere.

Apparently the objective is to provide a substitute for our bases in Saudi Arabia, both in terms of oil and military presence. Presumably this is being done in part to keep the Saudis happy, because they are afraid that the presence of US troops on their soil excites domestic resistance. The influential Saudi royal family no doubt prefers to have US troops and Iraqi leaders facing down resistance in Baghdad than in Riyadh.

But of course we are still telling the Iraqis that they will "eventually vote and govern" their own country, and that we have no intention to "occupy" it.

In any case, for those who oppose this war, as well as for the vast majority of Americans who have swallowed **the brave new lies** that our only long-term interest in Iraq was to "remove Saddam's tyranny," "rebuild Iraq's economy and democracy" and "withdraw," the key issue is -- when should withdrawal start?

In light of the recent crisis, the war's architects have not been able to get on with their agenda quite so easily as they once hoped. Faced with the acute security crisis noted above, they now tell us that if we only **increase the number of troops in Iraq for two more years**, and provide the extra \$120 billion that this will require, we can all return to the original smooth transition plan.

On the other hand, they also claim that, unless the Coalition stays the course, Iraq will disintegrate into civil war, instability, and chaos -- even worse conditions, somehow, than already exist.

To this hokum **we say**, first, as noted above, **the credibility of war's architects is not exactly unsullied.**

And now they seem to be proposing yet another episode of "Who Do You Believe -- Me, Or Your Lying Eyes?" As Peter Gutmann once remarked,

We're standing there pounding a dead parrot on the counter, and the management response is to frantically swap in new counters to see if that fixes the problem.

The good news is that the war's architects and pamphleteers are actually very few in number. As **the New York Times' Thomas Friedman** said in an interview with **Ha'aretz**, the leading Israeli newspaper, in 2002,

This is a war the neoconservatives wanted.....(and) marketed. Those people had an idea to sell when September 11th came, and they sold it. Oh boy, how they sold it. This is not a war that the masses demanded. This is the war of an elite. I could give you the names of 25 people (all of whom sit within a 5-block radius of my Washington D.C. office, who, if you had exiled them to a desert island a year and a half ago, the Iraq War would not have happened.

So if this tiny band was able to wield so much influence in our erstwhile democracy, and a much larger number now realize that their assumptions were wrong, shouldn't it be possible to reverse course?

Or is it the case that we are now locked into sitting through this whole dreary play?

We say that it is actually the continued occupation that is the greatest threat to stabilization, democratization, the restoration of the Iraqi economy and oil exports, and the preservation of a unified Iraq.

Indeed, Iraqi hostility to the US/UK occupation has now reached the point where securing these goals is much more likely if the Coalition forces withdraw as soon as possible.

This is true for several reasons:

- The announcement of a definite schedule for a US withdrawal will almost instantly cool the resistance, reduce the leverage of the radicals and the "foreign fighters," permit Iraq's beleaguered police force to focus on fighting crime, and allow the reconstruction of the economy to proceed.
- Mainstream Iraqis know full well how to restore order in their own neighborhoods, once the US provocation is gone. Absent the occupation, the vast majority of Iraqis have will have little patience for foreign subversives like Zarqawi, and will throw the bastards out. Indeed, an astute US withdrawal from Iraq would surely be as sad a day for "terrorists" as the US invasion of Iraq was a happy one.
- A clear withdrawal timetable would make it clear to the Iraqis that the US has no imperial intentions with respect to their oil wealth. It would permit them, indeed, to recover some of the pride that they must have lost, by having to rely on a foreign power to get rid of their

dictator -- even if they did not oust Saddam, they could feel, at least they were able to oust the most powerful hegemon on the planet. That along could provide the ideological foundations for a vast rebirth of national pride.

- Such a withdrawal would also permit us to **remove the provocative presence of largely-Christian US troops** in this overwhelmingly Muslim country. It would also **clear the way for UN assistance and multilateral development aid, as well as debt relief**, to flow more freely into the country.
- Few Iraqis want a return to dictatorship -- **the demand for democracy is overwhelming**. It is indeed odd and un-American for the United States of America, in particular, to insist that Iraqi democracy can only be established at the point of a gun, under the guiding hand of a foreigner. I don't recall the Founding Fathers at Constitution Hall in Philadelphia requiring much help from Tony Blair's predecessors or the British monarchy.
- As General Odom has argued, a clear timetable for a US withdrawal would actually **help the UN, or perhaps other Muslim states, to send in peace-keeping forces** of their own.
- So long as the war in central and southern Iraq continues, the Kurds have every incentive to continue to move toward complete independence. Only the restoration of Iraq's central government, and the prospect of "win win" gains from interregional trade and development, can break down these regional ethnic barriers, and **keep Kurdistan within Iraq**.
- A US/UK withdrawal, according to a pre-announced timetable that is brisk, yet responsible, and conditioned on the preservation of security, will give Iraqis **an incentive to observe and enforce their own general ceasefire**, so long as they clearly see progress being made. Unlike the situation in Israel, where the occupiers have been stalling for more than 30 years on "security" grounds, the US has no settler minority that is trying to hold on to Iraqi resources, unless it is Chalabi's band of thieves, thirsting after an oil privatization. But we don't have to be hostage to his demands; if he becomes a problem, we can simply approve Iraq's new extradition treaty with Jordan, cut off his \$300,000 per month allowance, and dump him over the border in Jordan, so that he can [finally stand trial for bank fraud](#).

- If it did turn out that this little experiment with a **pre-scheduled withdrawal** failed, and the Iraqis themselves, perhaps with UN assistance, were unable to develop a peaceful government, there'd be **nothing to prevent the UN or even the US from returning** with a more rested, better trained peace-keeping force. After all, we're now pretty sure that the Iraqi Army is not about to fight us with WMDs!
- In the event that a civil war erupted in Iraq, and the situation somehow managed to deteriorate from the abysmal state where it is right now -- which [58 percent of Iraqis](#) believe is "the same or worse" than before Saddam's removal -- peacekeepers would probably be welcomed by the majority of Iraqis. This is unlike the current situation, where only [a third of Iraqis](#) believe the Coalition forces are doing more good than harm.

All told, the case for a US unilateral withdrawal from Iraq seems very compelling. If the case for it is made to the American people by a leading political figure, it could also be politically very successful. But, other than a marginal, if courageous and thoughtful, candidate like Ralph Nader, is willing to pick up this torch?

Where, indeed, is our Robert Kennedy? Where is the major US political figure who is willing to stand up to this war?

Of course there are some self-styled "conservatives" in the audience -- people who have otherwise somehow found it possible to give a hearty "Sieg Heil" to one of the most radical, un-Constitutional, internationally illegal, risky, costly and irresponsible exertions of military power in US history -- who will no doubt argue, as they did in the case of Vietnam, that this abrupt policy reversal " might be risky."

After all, it might undermine US credibility! It might encourage the world's terrorists! It might make our own allies distrust us! It might jeopardize national security!

These are the same folks whose tidy little war plan has just sullied America's image and credibility almost beyond repair. It has poured hundreds of billions of dollars and thousands of liters of human blood into the sands of the Iraqi desert. It has helped make Iraq more of a sanctuary for the world's worst terrorists than ever before. It has alienated the entire world, and succeeded in making many Iraqis actually long for the old regime.

As Bertrand Russell once remarked, "The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts."

Or, as Peter Gutmann might have said, the war's supporters are still trying to swap in new counters and pound them with the same old dead parrots.

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