

## SECURITY HERE AND ABROAD

### Crunch time in Iraq

Sunday, March 19, 2006

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As bad as things are right now in Iraq -- and to be clear, we are on the brink of disaster -- if a necessary and significant change in course is not undertaken soon, and deftly managed, things could get much worse; in Iraq and in the Persian Gulf. A number of factors have contributed to the deteriorating security situation in Iraq, but in the end, it all comes down to this; the failure of the coalition to establish a safe and secure environment.

There are simply not enough troops in Iraq to deal simultaneously with a persistent insurgency and hundreds of deadly al Qaeda operatives, let alone a full-scale civil war involving sizable militias. Of course, fault lies not with the lieutenants and sergeants and privates who bravely patrol Iraqi neighborhoods. U.S. senior policy-makers have utterly failed to shape the strategic conditions -- in Iraq, in the region and globally -- to win.

They have failed to assemble a robust coalition; one capable of establishing an environment sufficiently secure to facilitate national reconciliation, allow political and governing structures to mature, and permit reconstruction and economic recovery. They have failed to secure the support for our efforts among Arab and Muslim nations. Finally, they have failed to convince our traditional friends and allies that they have a vital stake in what happens in Iraq.

Though one can easily become fixated on the troubling situation in Iraq, it is dangerous to look at developments in Iraq in isolation, or "through a straw" as some say. Though the issue of troop levels is critical, let's digress for a moment to examine Iran, which Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared is our gravest security threat.

Iran, who is making things difficult for us in Iraq, is going to emerge stronger, in terms of its regional influence and prestige, once the dust finally settles. If we reconcile ourselves, however grudgingly, to this regrettable but inevitable outcome, we might be able to somehow carve out a positive role for Iran in the region. The time has come to abandon confrontation characterized by empty and dangerous threats. We ought to conditionally offer to normalize U.S.-Iranian relations, formulate a comprehensive Iran policy that is both rational and realistic, and suggest other initiatives that would gain the support of our allies and other countries in the region. There is opportunity to do this, as the White House just has authorized the U.S. ambassador to Iraq to talk to Iran about issues specifically relating to Iraq.

Normalizing relations with Iran is a prerequisite to developing long-term regional security arrangements; and it would be essential to establishing a limited but constructive role for Iran on matters that relate to Iraq. Such actions would represent a sea change in U.S. policy, one that would likely resonate with our European allies and with the major countries in the Arab-Muslim world; and it might entice those now on the sidelines to get into the game at this dangerous and late hour. Indeed, it is crunch time in Iraq.

More troops are needed at a time when the United States cannot sustain current troop levels. Few options are available, besides expanding the coalition. We need sizable and immediate reinforcements in Iraq; infantry brigades and divisions, not a handful of symbolic contributions -- pastry-making platoons, or postal units.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is completely unsuited for the task of convincing other nations to join our efforts in Iraq and contribute desperately needed additional troops to the coalition. One cannot imagine that an approach by him for troop commitments from France, Germany, Russia, Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait would be greeted with any enthusiasm. For this reason, the president should accept Rumsfeld's resignation, and ask former Secretary of State Colin Powell, the retired general, to serve out his term.

Powell continues to enjoy the respect and confidence of those in uniform, Congress, and most importantly, our allies and friends overseas. His appointment as defense secretary would belatedly acknowledge that the current strategy in Iraq is problematic, that the United States intends to change course, and that we will seek the advice and renewed support of the global community in these efforts. Given Powell's devotion to the troops with whom he long served, and the precarious position in which they now find themselves in Iraq, chances are good that if called, he will serve again.

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