

In defense of victory

by Michael P. Ramirez

Despite the progress that Gen. David Petraeus outlined in his much-awaited report on the surge, critics claim little has been accomplished in the four years since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Democratic leaders who have already declared the war lost continue to criticize Iraq's ruling coalition for a lack of political progress.

They also cite impatience of the American public as the primary justification for unilateral withdrawal of all efforts to stabilize and secure Iraq.

But one must question the arbitrary deadline of September, imposed by Congress just three months after all troops were put in place for the surge. It took 12 years of deception and the violation of 17 U.N. resolutions to undertake this war in the first place.

We are at a critical juncture.

Critics say Operation Iraqi Freedom has been a mistake, that we went to war based on false pretenses and that the administration lied about weapons of mass destruction.

They see no link between events in Iraq and the global war on terror. And they say the war is producing only negative consequences for which removal of our troops is the only remedy.

But the argument for surrender can be deconstructed by revisiting the reasons we went to war, assessing the war's positive impact and weighing the catastrophic consequences of defeat.

The claim that Saddam Hussein had no WMD remains specious. This is obvious from the concealment and obfuscation chronicled by UNSCOM, the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq, which along with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was mandated to conduct inspections.

UNSCOM found extensive documentation by Iraq of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons programs, as well as the development of missiles with a range of over 150 kilometers. These were clearly in violation of U.N. Resolution 687, the terms of surrender of the Gulf War of 1991.

Here are a few notable entries taken verbatim from the UNSCOM chronology:

- June 23-28, 1991: UNSCOM/IAEA inspectors tried to intercept Iraqi vehicles carrying nuclear-related material. The equipment was later seized and destroyed.

- Sept. 21-30, 1991: IAEA found large amounts of documents relating to Iraq's effort to acquire nuclear weapons.

- July 1992: UNSCOM began the destruction of large quantities of Iraq's chemical weapons and production facilities.

- June 1994: UNSCOM completed the destruction of large quantities of chemical warfare agents and precursors and their production equipment.

- Aug. 8, 1995: Iraq admitted having achieved greater progress in its efforts to produce long-range missiles than previously declared. Iraq provided UNSCOM and IAEA with large amounts of documentation, hidden on a chicken farm, related to its prohibited weapons programs, which led to further disclosures by Iraq concerning the production of the nerve agent VX and Iraq's development of a nuclear weapon.

- May-June 1996: UNSCOM supervised the destruction of Al-Hakam, Iraq's main facility for the production of biological warfare agents.

- October 1997: UNSCOM completed the destruction of additional, large quantities of chemical weapons, related equipment and precursor chemicals. Iraq had denied that part of the equipment was used for chemical weapons production. Only in May 1997, on the basis of UNSCOM's investigations, did Iraq admit that some of the equipment had been used in the production of VX.

- April 8, 1998: Experts admitted that Iraq's declaration on its biological program was incomplete and inadequate.

U.N. Resolution 1441, which was passed unanimously by the Security Council in November 2002, was a "final opportunity" for Iraq to comply with previous U.N. resolutions or "face serious consequences."

The U.N. stated unequivocally that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and failed to provide complete disclosure and unconditional access to them, their components, production facilities and locations.

Further, it said Iraq failed to provide proof of the destruction of these weapons.

Resolution 1441 also stated that "the government of Iraq had failed to comply with its commitments pursuant to Resolution 687 with regard to terrorism, pursuant to Resolution 688 to end repression of its civilian population and to provide access to humanitarian organizations to all those in need in Iraq."

The U.S.-led war that ensued ended nuclear programs in Iraq and Libya. Iraq no longer possesses any WMD. Our intervention also ended policies of genocide and repression by the Saddam regime.

Since Saddam was replaced, Iraqis have conducted their first-ever democratic elections in choosing their transitional government and elected a National Assembly.

Admittedly, that assembly has made progress on only a few of its political benchmarks.

But considering the importance of laying a foundation for governance, this should be an issue not of speed, but of careful consideration.

While Congress debates arbitrary timelines for the Iraqi assembly, it has passed none of its own 12 appropriations bills. Meanwhile, leaders of al-Qaida sit impotent in a cave somewhere in western Pakistan, shifting the front line in the war on terror to Iraq.

The notion that Iraq is not connected with al-Qaida is absurd. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, founder of al-Qaida, was in Iraq before the war. He fled there from Afghanistan after we overthrew the Taliban.

Many documented communications occurred between al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden; bin Laden's No. 2, Ayman al-Zawahiri; and Zarqawi. Also, al-Qaida itself has proclaimed the new front is in Iraq.

So why, when the surge is having positive results, would we want to substitute victory with premature retreat? Surrender would have catastrophic consequences for the region and embolden our enemies, all for nothing more than politics.

From 1993 to 2000, several terrorist attacks - from the first attempt to bring down the World Trade Center to the bombing of the USS Cole - went unanswered by the U.S. and emboldened our enemies. The result was the horrific attack on the Twin Towers and Pentagon in 2001.

Imagine what our enemies would do if we failed in Iraq. And think of the resulting slaughter of innocent Iraqis as their country falls into civil war and becomes a terror state like pre-9/11 Afghanistan.

If we could have invaded Afghanistan and prevented 9/11, would it have been worth it? Of course. Why should America apologize for pursuing democracy, ending genocide and ensuring our national security against a global enemy in a region of vast economic importance?

If it took years to establish Iraq as a stable democratic ally and counter to Iran in an increasingly hostile region, would it be worth it? What if it required the presence of American troops for decades? We've been in Korea since 1950.

We live in a society with a short attention span, bent on immediate gratification.

One wonders if Americans today would support a war that took eight years to introduce democracy, four more years to finalize a constitutional framework, two additional years to establish a working government and two years beyond that to secure individual rights and liberties for its citizens.

If this war produced nothing more than a temporary union that was later torn asunder by an even larger civil war, would there be open rebellion?

Fortunately, another generation of Americans made that commitment long ago. It resulted in the creation of a nation that has become a beacon of democracy and freedom for future generations - the United States of America.

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