



Compelling the Insurgents Exit Strategy

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American, or even future Iraqi, military prowess won't be enough to defeat Iraq's bloody insurgency. Victory in Iraq is going to come as much - or more - from political/economic progress in that battered nation as it will from military dominance.

Which means that - rather than engaging in mostly useless, politically-motivated caterwauling about a U.S. military "exit strategy" from Iraq - Washington's political class should be concentrating on developing a comprehensive political/economic/ military strategy to compel the insurgents to plan their exit strategy.

As we all know from our still-painful experience in Vietnam, battlefield victories, while important, are often irrelevant in determining war's outcome. Political and economic conditions "on the ground" are also critical.

The next big political milestone in Iraq comes in just over two weeks - the national elections on Dec. 15. These should establish Iraq's first democrati-

cally-elected, four-year term government - another key step in advancing a complete strategy for success in Iraq.

Iraq's first "permanent" government will have greater credibility domestically and higher standing internationally, allowing it to (potentially) make more progress on key political, economic and security issues at home and abroad than any of its (post-Saddam) predecessors.

The most daunting political challenge facing the new government will be to find a way to strip the Sunnis out of the insurgency. Benching the Baathists would reduce insurgency numbers by three-quarters - and bring a significant increase in stability and security.

(Unfortunately, dealing with al Qaeda's Abu Musab al Zarqawi and his band of undeterable, indiscriminate killers demands a law-enforcement/military solution.)

The new Iraqi government may also be able to negotiate a modus vivendi with its meddlesome Iranian and Syrian neighbors, quelling their support for the insurgency. While the Americans will eventually leave Iraq, the fact that Iraq borders both these countries isn't going to change.

Historically, these three neighbors have been rivals, even enemies - so both Iran and Syria hope to prevent Iraq from resuming a regional power role. But in the long run, it's in Tehran's and Damascus' interest to get along with Baghdad's new power brokers unless they want to ensure Iraq is an enemy once more.

Don't overlook economics (i.e., reconstruction), either. The Iraqi jobless rate may exceed 40 percent - a recipe for disaster: This morning's frustrated, unemployed Iraqi could easily become tonight's enthusiastic, fully-employed insurgent.

To alleviate poverty and promote Iraqi prosperity, American and other international reconstruction/ development aid should go to employ Iraqis as much as possible, instead of foreign contractors. We also need to pressure "dead-beat" donors - who've delivered only \$3 billion of a promised \$13 billion - to make good.

Iraqi ministries are struggling, too. Ongoing anecdotes of electricity and water shortages and a floundering oil industry are far too common. Domestic ministries need increased U.S. and international assistance to reconstruct Iraq efficiently and effectively.

The clamoring for clear-cut exit strategies on Capitol Hill didn't begin with

Iraq; recent U.S. military operations in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans had their critics, too. Regrettably, while we're free to choose our interventions, we're not free to dictate the time and treasure triumph will require.

A successful Iraqi strategy requires the development of a desired end-state (e.g., a stable, democratic Iraqi government that can provide for its own internal/external defense) and the appropriate application of political, economic and military resources to achieve the desired outcome. This means that we'll achieve total victory in Iraq if, and only if, we're able to advance the situation in Iraq politically and economically - not just militarily.

The American people's support and appreciation of the difficulties of winning is also critical to the effort. Even if the White House/Pentagon developed a broadly palatable exit strategy, like any other military plan, it's unlikely to survive contact with the enemy. Warfare is dangerous and highly unpredictable; victory in war is part science, part art - and part blind luck.

What is certain is that the stakes in Iraq are enormous. Failure could mean the development of an al Qaeda safe haven; southern Iraq being absorbed into an Iranian Shia "super state"; or an ethnic/religious-based civil war that could spill over into Turkey, Iran and even Jordan.

Despite the naysayers, victory - and an honorable withdrawal of U.S. forces - are still well within our reach in Iraq. Let's not snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.