



Get Zaraqawi

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For a moment, focus on the present. Right now, there are three reasons the United States needs to be in Iraq. The most important: to fight al-Qaeda, the leader of the global Militant Islamist movement, the sworn enemy of America and freedom. Wherever al-Qaeda is, Americans must be there, too -- with weapons at the ready. And without question, al-Qaeda's most lethal units are in Iraq, commanded by Abu Musab al-Zaraqawi.

A secondary reason we must stay in Iraq: to do what we can to help prevent the people of that country from again being enslaved and slaughtered by tyrants. Yes, that has proven to be a tougher mission than imagined, much more difficult than toppling Saddam Hussein. "Yes, we did indeed underestimate the ferocity and ruthlessness of the jihadists in Iraq," says author Christopher Hitchens. "Where, one might inquire, have we not underestimated those forces and their virulence?"

That brings us to a third largely unspoken reason we must stay in Iraq: to learn. The U.S. military is exquisitely equipped to fight last century's wars. We shed much blood teaching ourselves to overcome German tanks and Japanese kamikazes; we spent much treasure deterring Soviet nuclear missiles. Inconveniently, however, our enemies now fight with Improvised Explosive Devices, suicide bombers, butchers knives, lies and videotape. And they will use Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) should they get their hands on them.

If America's military fails to master the art and science of post-modern warfare in Iraq, there can be only two choices: Learn on the next battlefield (Jordan? Afghanistan? Lebanon?), or don't bother to learn at all; instead, get used to the taste of retreat and defeat.

For a moment, focus on the past -- which appears to be changing. Retired Marine Corps General Bernard E. Trainor and longtime Pentagon reporter Michael R. Gordon report in *The New York Times* that Iraq's top generals believed that Saddam Hussein retained an arsenal of WMD and were shocked when told that such weapons would not be available in the event of an American invasion.

What happened to Saddam's VX nerve gas and anthrax? Bill Tierney, a former UN weapons inspector, Arabic speaker and translator for the FBI, obtained 12 hours of taped conversations of Saddam that had been confiscated in Iraq after the invasion. Tierney's analysis is that Saddam did rebuild his WMD after the first Gulf War, did intend to give them to terrorists to use them against the Americans but, at some point, secretly poured his chemical weapons into lakes and rivers while shipping other stocks over the border to Syria.

In other words, Bush did not "lie." Rather he relied on what CIA director George Tenet told him -- that it was a "slam dunk" that Saddam retained stockpiles of WMD. And that appraisal was likely based in part on what even Saddam's generals believed to be the truth.

Sunday is the third anniversary of the American liberation of Iraq. Al-Qaeda terrorists and Saddam loyalists have challenged Americans in such places as Fallujah and Tal Afar. Americans

fought and won. The terrorists have bombed and beheaded hundreds of civilians. Americans have stood their ground. Now the anti-Iraq forces are attempting to foment a civil war -- figuring Americans will not want to take sides or get caught in the middle.

"We can expect the enemy will try again" to pit Iraqis against one another, President Bush said on Monday, in remarks to the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies in Washington. "They will continue to sow violence and destruction designed to stop the emergence of a free and democratic Iraq."

Bush added: "The battle lines in Iraq are clearly drawn for the world to see, and there is no middle ground. The enemy will emerge from Iraq one of two ways: emboldened or defeated."

For a moment, focus on the future: America cannot afford to again embolden its enemies as it did in Beirut in 1983 and Somalia in 1993 and in other places at other times. America cannot afford to leave Iraq with Zarqawi in any condition to claim credit for the departure. The reality and the perception must be that American military and intelligence forces have mastered the skills necessary to defeat their 21st century enemies.

And while no one can guarantee that freedom and human rights will prevail in a united Iraq, history should record that Americans did everything in their power to achieve that outcome.

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