



## **Iraq is just test of will for America**

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James Baker's "Iraq Study Group" seems to have been cast on the same basis as Liza Minnelli's last wedding. A stellar lineup: Donna Summer, Mickey Rooney, the Doobie Brothers, Gina Lollobrigida, Michael Jackson, Mia Farrow, Little Anthony and the Imperials, Jill St. John. That's Liza's wedding, not the Baker Commission. But at both gatherings everyone who was anyone was there, no matter how long ago it was they were anyone. So the fabulous Baker boy was accompanied by Clinton officials Leon Panetta and Bill Perry, Clinton golfing buddy Vernon Jordan, Clinton's fellow sex fiend Chuck Robb, the quintessential "moderate" Republican Alan Simpson, Supreme Court swing vote par excellence Sandra Day O'Connor . . .

God, I can't go on. I'd rather watch Mia Farrow making out with Mickey Rooney to a Doobie Brothers LP. As its piece de resistance, the Baker Commission concluded its deliberations by inviting testimony from -- drumroll, please -- Sen. John F. Kerry. If you're one of those dummies who goofs off in school, you wind up in Iraq. But, if you're sophisticated and nuanced, you wind up on a commission about Iraq. Rounding it all out -- playing David Gest to Jim Baker's Liza -- is, inevitably, co-chairman Lee Hamilton, former congressman from Indiana. As you'll recall, he also co-chaired the 9/11 Commission, in accordance with Article II Section 5 of the U.S. Constitution, which states: "Ye monopoly of wisdom on ye foreign policy, national security and other weighty affairs shall be vested in a retired Representative from the

9th District in Indiana, if he be sufficiently venerable of mien. In the event that he becomes incapacitated, his place shall be taken by Jill St. John." I would be calling for a blue-ribbon commission to look into whether we need all these blue-ribbon commissions, but they'd probably get Lee Hamilton to chair that, too.

Don't get me wrong, I like a Friars' Club Roast as much as the next guy and I'm sure Jim Baker kibitzing with John Kerry was the hottest ticket in town. But doesn't it strike you as just a tiny bit parochial? Aside from Senator Kerry, I wonder whether the commission thought to hear from anyone such as Goh Chok Tong, the former prime minister of Singapore. A couple of years back, on a visit to Washington just as the Democrat-media headless-chicken quagmire-frenzy was getting into gear, he summed it up beautifully: "The key issue is no longer WMD or even the role of the U.N. The central issue is America's credibility and will to prevail."

As I write in my new book, Singaporean Cabinet ministers apparently understand that more clearly than U.S. senators, congressmen and former secretaries of state. Or, as one Baker Commission grandee told the New York Times, "We had to move the national debate from whether to stay the course to how do we start down the path out."

An "exit strategy" on those terms is the path out not just from Iraq but from a lot of other places, too -- including Iran, North Korea, Sudan,

Venezuela, Russia, China, the South Sandwich Islands. For America would be revealed to the world as a fraud: a hyperpower that's all hype and no power -- or, at any rate, no will. According to the New York Sun, "An expert adviser to the Baker-Hamilton commission expects the 10-person panel to recommend that the Bush administration pressure Israel to make concessions in a gambit to entice Syria and Iran to a regional conference . . ."

On the face of it, this sounds an admirably hard-headed confirmation of James Baker's most celebrated soundbite on the Middle East "peace process": "F - - k the Jews. They didn't vote for us anyway." His recommendations seem intended to f - - k the Jews well and truly by making them the designated fall guys for Iraq. But hang on: If Israel could be forced into giving up the Golan Heights and other land (as some fantasists suggest) in order to persuade the Syrians and Iranians to ease up on killing coalition forces in Iraq, our enemies would have learned an important lesson: The best way to weaken Israel is to kill Americans. I'm all for Bakerite cynicism, but this would seem to f - - k not just the Jews but the Americans, too.

It would, furthermore, be a particularly contemptible confirmation of a line I heard Bernard Lewis, our greatest Middle Eastern scholar, use the other day -- that "America is harmless as an enemy and treacherous as a friend." To punish your friends as a means of rewarding your enemies for killing your forces would seem to be an almost ludi-

crously parodic illustration of that dictum. In the end, America would be punishing itself. The world would understand that Vietnam is not the exception but the rule.

It has been strange to see my pals on the right approach Iraq as a matter of inventory and personnel. Many call for more troops to be sent to Baghdad, others say the U.S. armed forces overall are too small and overstretched. Look, America is responsible for 40 percent of the planet's military spending: It spends more money on its armed forces than the next 43 biggest militaries combined, from China, Britain and France all the way down the military-spending hit parade to Montenegro and Angola. Yet it's not big enough to see off an insurgency confined to a 30-mile radius of a desert capital?

It's not the planes, the tanks, the men, the body armor. It's the political will. You can have the best car in town, but it won't go anywhere if you don't put your foot on the pedal. Three years ago, when it was obvious Syria and Iran were violating Iraq's borders with impunity, we should have done what the British

did in the so-called "Confrontation" with Indonesia 40 years ago when they were faced with Jakarta doing to the newly independent state of Malaysia exactly what Damascus and Tehran are doing to Iraq. British, Aussie and Malaysian forces sent troops on low-key, lethally effective raids into Indonesia, keeping the enemy on the defensive and winning the war with barely a word making the papers. If the strategic purpose in invading Iraq was to create a regional domino effect, then playing defense in the Sunni Triangle for three years makes no sense. We should never have wound up hunkered down in the Green Zone. If there has to be a Green Zone, it should be on the Syrian side of the border.

Perhaps the Baker Commission's proposals will prove not to be as empty and risible as those leaked. But, if they are, the president should pay them no heed. A bipartisan sell-out -- the Republicans cut and the Democrats run -- would be an awesome self-humiliation of the United States. And once the rest of the world figures it out, it'll be America that's the Green Zone.