



President Bush's new plan: Redirecting Iraq's campaign

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In short, President George W. Bush's plan for "redirecting" the Iraq campaign is logical, in line with the war on terror and targets the correct enemies of Iraq, of democracies and of the United States. But the plan needs to fit within a global vision of winning the global conflict with the Jihadists, on a long term policy, win the support of the new Congress, and be well explained to the American people by the various levels of the administration. This is where the beef is: On the other hand, the response by the Democratic-led Congress as stated by Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) is also logical, touches sensitive issues if the Iraq battlefield, and lays out the normal outcome of a strategic success: that is the return of the troops. So are the White House and Congress in harmony? We will see. Both have ad-

vanced what is essentially logical. The President challenge is to make sure his bureaucracy follows him thoroughly, and the Congress' challenge is to make sure the American public sees the big picture the legislators are not revealing yet for the future. Let's wait and see how Washington's new dual approach will fare in the very near future.

President Bush's renewed strategy

Following are quick comments on the main relevant points in the President's speech, immediately after he made his announcements.

1) *The description of the foes:* It has survived pressures put by overseas and domestic forces on the US to change the rhetoric: Yes the radical Islamists (which I still propose to

coin Jihadists) on the one hand and the Iranian Mullahs regime are the combined adversary of both Iraqi democracy and the US, as well as of peace and security in the region.

2) *The Baghdad Plan*: The suggestion that saturating the capital with as much troops needed to clean up, maintain the strategic security and transfer to the Iraqi forces is by itself logical, if the global commitment is to strategically win the war and not to win a big battle so that troops can be quickly withdrawn regardless of future developments. But the new Baghdad Plan makes sense only if there is a new Iraq plan as a whole. If the so-called "surge" is only to satisfy American pride now, Americans will pay a higher price later in the process. But if the plan is to move the geopolitics of the War forward, the Baghdad step fits the wider puzzle of surging Iraq out of the current equation. So, if the plan is successful, and the city is somewhat transformed into a "security island" and a launching pad for wider circles of Government led offensives all the way to the border, this is a winning vision. And the "ifs" are very important.

3) *Embedding*: Another commitment is very important and should have been implemented earlier: embedding US units in larger Iraqi forces. General Abizaid has recommended it. Many voices (including modestly myself during the invasion in 2003) have called desperately to perform the embedding at all stages. An Iraqi Army fighting its enemies with US and coalition forces at its core is a winning card in the conflict. But this supposes a strong support by

Iraq's political establishment. Washington cannot immerse its forces within Iraq's new units and fight along with them, while Baghdad's politicians criticize the American ally on Arab TV networks. They cannot have it both ways. The President and the Democratic response seemed to have clarified this to the Iraqi Government.

4) *Al Qaeda's objectives*: The President description of al Qaeda's objectives is drawn from reality. Indeed, the organization, its Salafi and Wahabi supporters want to control the "triangle," and particularly the Anbar province to launch a "radical Islamic empire." The President shouldn't be afraid to give it the name al Qaeda uses: a Caliphate.

5) *Iran and Syria*: Perhaps the most surprising to the political elite in this country (US) and in the region, was the clear position towards the Iranian and Syrian regimes and their policies regarding Iraq. While the anti-American camp was beating the drum during the past months, announcing that Washington has completely fallen to the reality of Tehran and Damascus' "wisdom," the White House's new plan shattered these fantasies: no, there won't be surrender to Ahmedinijad and Assad. Instead the President, naturally and calmly, reconfirmed what military, security and local observers have known all along: Iran and Syria are aiding and abetting the Terror war in Iraq and providing "material support" to the Jihadists. The President vowed the US and its allies would "interrupt and destroy these networks." This

specific announcement is by far the single most important statement. I would even see it as higher strategically than the Baghdad's surge. For by deterring the two regimes from crumbling the young democracy in Iraq, America will begin seeing and also understanding the outcome of the conflict. The "other steps" announced by Mr. Bush are of the language understood by the Mullahs to the East and the Baathists to the West of Iraq: Deploying a strike force in the Persian Gulf, activating intelligence capacities and installing Patriot systems across from Iran is the only message that would reach the ears of the Pasdarans commanders and get back to Muqtada al Sadr in Karbala. But again, along with these "messages" Washington should be talking to the Iranian opposition as well and at the same time. This is the framework I referred to above: A surge in Baghdad makes sense only if it is part of a surge in Iraq.

6) *Turkey*: Another smart statement was to inform Ankara that a cooperation between Iraq and Turkey can reassure the "Kemalist" Republic that no chaos will enflame its south eastern provinces, while Iraq's Kurds will be part of security arrangements. Such a message could calm the concerns of both the Kurds in Northern Iraq and the Turkish secular establishment; however the Islamists elite may have other plans.

7) *Tehran's Nukes and Threats*: Pointing out that a nuclear Iran under a "hateful ideology" is not going to be accepted by the region, and by the international community, is another

important point. This red line has to be reaffirmed, especially as Ahmedinijad and his HizbAllah allies in Lebanon are waging a war of attrition against the moderates both Sunnis and Shiia in the region. Reminding Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf principalities that a collapse in Iraq and a defeat of the US in the region will be a prelude to an offensive by Iran's regime against them, is a must.

8) *The big picture*: Last but not least, reminding Americans and democracies around the world that the War on Terror will be decided by the outcome of an "ideological struggle" between "moderation and extremists" is needed. It is important that the President, Congress but also the intellectual establishment expands its condemnation of the "hateful ideology," names it and prescribes the medicine: freedom. It was crucial that the speech would indicate that the other candidates to democratic statehood in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine are looking at Iraq's outcome. Equally important was to predict that Terrorism won't stop and that victory in the Arab world would occur when democracy will turn the tides, as I will make the case in my forthcoming book this spring.

Finally, by calling on Congress to form a bipartisan committee and by naming a seasoned leader such as Senator Joe Lieberman to work on a new consensus, Mr. Bush did the right thing that is to respond to the American public's message sent last fall, but also during the elections of 2004: Unity against the Jihadists.

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