



## Surge, or Power Failure?

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George F. Will

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As the president contemplates a "surge" of U.S. troops into Baghdad, a Vietnam analogy is pertinent. A surge might merely intensify a policy that is akin to the Vietnam policy of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and Gen. William Westmoreland. A better policy might resemble that of two men who subsequently occupied the offices those men held -- Mel Laird, President Richard Nixon's first defense secretary, and Gen. Creighton Abrams, who in 1968 replaced Westmoreland as U.S. commander in Vietnam.

Nixon won the 1968 election with an implicit promise to replace the McNamara-Westmoreland policy of engagement and attrition ("search and destroy"), which was failing militarily in Vietnam and politically in America. Nixon's policy, formu-

lated with Laird and Abrams, was for phased withdrawals of U.S. forces, coinciding with increased U.S. advisers and other aid for South Vietnam's army. The announced policy of withdrawals gave the United States some leverage to force the government in Saigon -- not a paragon but better than the government in Baghdad today -- to recognize that the clock was running on its acceptance of responsibility for Vietnam's security.

Unfortunately, the political climate in Washington today is analogous to that of 60 years ago. In 1946-47, partisan divisions, deepened by disdain for a president considered to be in over his head, were threatening to make it impossible to reverse the unraveling of the U.S. position in the region that then was most cru-

cial to U.S. interests -- Europe. In 1946, the president's party lost control of both houses of Congress in what was partly a vote of no confidence in President Harry Truman. A shattered Europe was sliding toward chaos, with communism gaining ground in Western as well as Central Europe.

Truman, however, embraced a proposal for substantial U.S. aid to Europe but directed that Secretary of State George Marshall's name, not his, be on it. That was achieved when Marshall made the proposal at Harvard's commencement in June 1947. Truman also instructed Marshall and his deputy, Dean Acheson, to make necessary accommodations with Sen. Arthur Vandenberg, the Michigan Republican who chaired the Foreign Relations Committee.

Today, no one has a promising idea for Iraq comparable to the Marshall Plan. And who would be the Democrats' Vandenberg, capable of muting Democrats' ferocious rejection of all the president's ideas?

Recently, after his 10th trip to Iraq, former Marine Bing West, now a correspondent for the Atlantic Monthly, noted that 70 percent of U.S. casualties are not from bullets but from roadside bombs. The enemy rarely engages in sustained firefights with U.S. forces, so U.S. forces are killing fewer insurgents than the insurgents recruit. Furthermore, U.S. units spend 15 to 30 percent of their time training Iraqis: "If winning is not a direct goal for U.S. units, we don't need so many troops in Iraq. If winning is a direct

goal, we don't have enough units in Iraq," he said.

Under a "Laird-Abrams" approach, winning would be the "direct goal" of Iraqi units. There is, however, this sobering arithmetic: Based on experience in the Balkans, an assumption among experts is that to maintain order in a context of sectarian strife requires one competent soldier or police officer for every 50 people. For the Baghdad metropolitan area (population: 6.5 million), that means 130,000 security personnel. There are 120,000 now, but 66,000 of them are Iraqi police, many -- perhaps most -- of whom are worse than incompetent. Because their allegiances are to sectarian factions, they are not responsive to legitimate central authority. They are part of the problem. Therefore even a substantial surge of, say, 30,000 U.S. forces would leave Baghdad that many short and could be a recipe for protracting failure.

Today, Gen. George Casey, U.S. commander in Baghdad, is in hot water with administration proponents of a "surge" because he believes what he recently told the New York Times: "The longer we in the U.S. forces continue to bear the main burden of Iraq's security, it lengthens the time that the government of Iraq has to take the hard decisions about reconciliation and dealing with the militias. And the other thing is that they can continue to blame us for all of Iraq's problems, which are at base their problems."

Baghdad today is what Wayne White -- 26 years with the State Depart-

ment's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, now with the Middle East Institute -- calls "a Shiite-Sunni Stalingrad." Imagine a third nation's army operating between -- and

against -- both the German and Russian forces in Stalingrad. *That* might be akin to the mission of troops sent in any surge.

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