



## **Minority Rule. In a war between moderates and fanatics who would you bet on?**

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In 1917, most Russians were not Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks were a minority, but they were fanatical and ruthless. So they prevailed -- and for most of the 20th century Russians lived and died under Communist oppression.

In 1933, most Germans were not Nazis. The Nazis were a minority, but they were fanatical and ruthless. Tens of millions would perish before Hitler's dream of world conquest collapsed.

Today, it is not clear that most Iraqis want to slaughter other Iraqis and return Iraq to despotism. But a fanatical and ruthless minority does.

This minority -- actually two rival minorities, one Sunni, one Shia --

enjoys the support of both al-Qaeda and the regime that rules Iran . That is not surprising. What is: the fact that such mass murderers are neither opposed nor even seriously condemned by "the international community." Instead, in the Middle East, Europe and even America , opposition and condemnation are meted out in fullest measure to those reluctant to quit the fight against the mass murderers.

In an interview with the Wall Street Journal's Bret Stephens, Iraqi parliamentarian Mithal al-Alusi declined to criticize Americans who favor abandoning Iraqis like him. (He is a democrat who has paid dearly for his beliefs: Two of his sons were gunned down in front of him by terrorists.) A debate over

Iraq , Alusi said, is something one should expect in a free country such as America . It is an expression of "values" he still hopes to see take root in his country as well.

According to data Stephens cited, Alusi is not alone. The University of Michigan 's Institute for Social Research found that between 2004 and 2006 the number of Iraqis who support the idea of an Islamic state declined from 30 percent to 22 percent. Meanwhile, those who favor separating religion and politics rose from 27 percent to 41 percent. In Baghdad , where sectarian violence has been most frequent, the number of people who see themselves as Iraqis first and Muslims second has doubled to 60 percent. And the percentage of Iraqis who say it "very important" for their nation to be a democracy has risen from 59 percent to 65 percent.

This suggests that neither Sunni nor Shia extremists are winning hearts and minds. Then again, they may not need to so long as they can put knives to throats and electric drills to skulls.

Newsweek's Fared Zakaria is among those who blame the violence on America. "We gave them a civil war," he said. That ignores both the demonstrated power of fanatical minorities and the ancient ethno-religious enmities that were constrained but not crushed during the decades Iraq was under Saddam Hussein's jackboot.

The syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer also is right to argue

that there is a difference between "giving" a civil war and failing to prevent one.

But I disagree with Krauthammer – a circumstance to which I am unaccustomed – when he writes: "Iraqis were given their freedom and yet many have chosen civil war." Only a small minority of Iraqis, I think, have made that choice. Most simply have no idea how to defend the liberties suddenly thrust upon them.

John Burns of The New York Times, the best reporter covering Iraq, recently told NBC's Tim Russert that while "American troops were greeted as liberators" immediately after the overthrow of Saddam, enthusiasm for the intervention diminished quickly once it became clear that U.S. forces could not -- or would not -- protect Iraqis from the terrorists in their midst.

Yes, it would have been wonderful had Iraqis spontaneously organized their own defense. But is it so astonishing that they did not? Burns said that longtime observers of Iraq "completely miscalculated the impact of 30 years of violent, brutal repression on the Iraqi people and their willingness, in President Bush's phrase, 'to stand up' for themselves, to take authority, to take risks ... Iraq was, by a long way, saving only North Korea, the nastiest place I've ever been. It was a truly terrible place ..."

Now, a last-ditch effort is being made to eliminate the terrorists from Baghdad , to give the majority of Iraqis a safe space to come to-

gether in opposition to a fanatical and ruthless minority that believes it can pave a path to power with carnage and chaos.

There is ample precedent for that belief. Mithal al-Alusi and others like him can only pray that Americans will find the will and a way to help decent Iraqis – a majority, I think -- carve out an exception.

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