



Defeating a Superpower

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To those who see the world through a partisan prism, last week's congressional vote to continue funding American troops in Iraq looks like a loss for Democrats. On the contrary: Those Democrats who refused to legislate an American military defeat -- despite intense pressure from a well-financed, well-organized campaign on the left -- deserve great credit.

No serious person doubts that America is at war with Islamist movements that seek the West's destruction. Among those movements, none is more threatening than al-Qaeda. And al-Qaeda's most active and lethal combatants are in Iraq. Recently, Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's second in command, sent a letter to Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, the leader of Al Qaeda forces in Iraq. In it, Zawahiri reassures Muhajir that

a great and historic victory is close at hand, that soon America will be driven out of Iraq. Among the tactics that both Zawahiri and Muhajir believe are proving effective: murdering innocent women and children to fuel sectarian strife.

Let's stipulate that had President Bush not toppled Saddam Hussein, most of these al-Qaeda terrorists would not be in Iraq, they would be somewhere else. The fact remains: They are in Iraq now. They are there because they regard Iraq -- an oil rich capital of the Arab world -- as the most important theater in what they say is a global power struggle.

They believe they are eroding our will to fight them in Iraq. And perhaps they are. But if they can achieve that goal in Iraq, is there any reason to think they won't be able to

achieve it in other parts of the world as well?

Iran's rulers also are America's enemies. After nearly 30 years it should be obvious that "Death to America!" is not just a catchy slogan: It is a long-term goal. And it is a goal toward which they believe they are progressing because we have done nothing over the past three decades to shake their confidence - not when they seized our embassy and took our diplomats hostage, not when they assigned Hezbollah to slaughter our Marines in Beirut, not when they killed our soldiers at Khobar Towers.

And as they move toward acquiring nuclear weapons, aid and abet those killing our troops in Iraq, and take visiting American scholars hostage, we do next to nothing. To them, it looks like the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, father of the Iranian Islamist revolution, was spot on when he stated: "America cannot do a damn thing."

The history of warfare is marked by innovations: the saddle and stirrup, the long bow, gunpowder, the cannon, mechanized cavalry, aircraft and missiles among them.

America's enemies are now testing an equally revolutionary innovation. They are attempting to discover whether it is possible to defeat a superpower with little except suicide-bombers, roadside explosives detonated by cell phones, and a ferocious will to power. They use these weapons to kill whomever they can: infidels or Muslims, combatants

or non-combatants, men, women and children alike.

One might have thought that such indiscriminate slaughter would evoke outrage and defiance within the international community. But the international community is selective about what evokes its outrage: reports (later proved to be false) of American guards at Guantanamo mishandling Korans? Absolutely. Beheadings and illustrated al-Qaeda instruction books on torture? That gets a yawn.

Congress has authorized four months of funding for Gen. David Petraeus, the new U.S. commander in Iraq. By September, he will need to show that he is making headway with his new strategy of bringing in reinforcements and moving troops out of big bases and into the mean streets of Baghdad and al-Qaeda-infested Anbar Province. While he does that, Ryan Crocker, the new U.S. ambassador to Iraq, must push as hard as he can to get Iraq's leaders to make risky compromises and assume heavy responsibilities.

Was it a mistake to invade Iraq? A majority of Americans now think it was. Some charge that Bush misled us; some believe he was misled. Others believe that Bush underestimated our enemies, and overestimated the abilities of his intelligence gatherers and analysts, Pentagon planners and State Department nation-builders.

That issue will be debated for generations. Right now, the more pressing question is this: How do we prevail in Iraq, understanding that

failure would be a body blow to America's security and vital interests? The answer, at least in part, is by giving Gen. Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker the support they

require – not signaling to al-Qaeda and Iran that they are only a few more suicide-bombings away from a great and historic victory.

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