



## Exit Strategy or Victory Strategy?

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**William Kristol and Robert Kagan**

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*El discurso del Presidente Bush en el National Endowment for Democracy expone el triunfo de la posición mantenida por los neocons dentro de la Administración Bush frente a la "estrategia" de Donald Rumsfeld. En este artículo, dos de los más significados neocons, ponen en evidencia el despiste de la posición mantenida por el Pentágono frente a la misma posición oficial y la necesidad de realizar rápidos e importantes cambios.*

THE FRONT PAGE of the November 7 Washington Post says it all. The first headline, in large type: "Bush Urges Commitment to Transform Mideast." Below, in slightly smaller type: "Pentagon to Shrink Iraq Force." And below that: "Iraqi Security Crews Getting Less Training." It's a jarring juxtaposition. The president eloquently makes the case for a necessarily and admirably ambitious foreign policy. Yet his own administration's deeds threaten the achievement of his goals.

In his fine speech to the National Endowment for Democracy last Thursday,

the president made the case for "a forward strategy of freedom" in the Middle East. He put the Iraq conflict in its proper context: "the establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event," but "the failure of Iraqi democracy would embolden terrorists around the world, increase dangers to the American people, and extinguish the hopes of millions in the region." Or, as the president said earlier in the week: "The enemy in Iraq believes America will run. That's why they're willing to kill innocent civilians, relief workers, coalition troops.

America will never run. America will do what is necessary . . ."

Except, apparently, increase American troop strength or take the time properly to train Iraqi security forces. On the Sunday talk shows at the beginning of last week, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld didn't exactly say that we were going to run, but he certainly sounded as if he were eyeing the exits. He emphasized that "you've got to get the security responsibility transferred to the Iraqi people. . . . It's their country. . . . We're not going to provide security in their country over a sustained period of time." And then on the same day as the president's speech, the Defense Department announced plans to reduce U.S. forces by about 20 percent in the next few months. The secretary of defense claimed that the rapid growth of Iraqi security forces made this draw-down possible--even though that growth has come at the cost of levels of training previously thought necessary to enable them to do their job.

In other words: The president wants to win, and the Pentagon wants to get out. It's of course *possible* we can do both at once. And it's also true that on the political side, there's a strong case for a faster transfer of power to the Iraqis. But the fact remains that over the short term we have a policy in contradiction with itself. Is it to be a victory strategy or an exit strategy? The president has, since 9/11, prevailed (on key matters) over the status quo foreign policy favored by his State Department. Will he now prevail over his Defense Department as well? After all, speeches are good; troops are better.

Now it's true that the pressures to draw down American forces are real. The Congressional Budget Office warns that the Army does not have sufficient active component forces to "maintain the occupation at its current size, limit de-

ployments to one year, and sustain all of its other commitments" around the world. The CBO is right. But we must also face the reality that we are a nation at war, and normal troop deployment schedules can no longer hold in every instance.

Moreover, almost three years into the Bush administration, the serious deficit in the overall size of American forces can no longer be blamed exclusively on the Clinton administration. When Vice President Dick Cheney was secretary of defense a dozen years ago, he recommended that the Army should have at least 12 divisions to meet American global responsibilities in the post-Cold War world. Today there are 10 divisions. Recently, more than 50 members of the House Armed Services Committee, including committee chairman Duncan Hunter, wrote to Rumsfeld asking him to increase overall troop strength by two divisions. But Rumsfeld remains dogmatically committed to a smaller force, despite the overwhelming evidence that the force is already dangerously inadequate to meet the president's stated strategic requirements.

The immediate danger is that the American mission in Iraq may be the first and most dire casualty of this administration's parsimony. In these pages a few weeks ago, Lewis Lehrman felicitously observed, "prudence counsels that to desire the Bush Doctrine is to desire the indispensable means to make it effective." So far, the Pentagon has shown little interest in developing and deploying the indispensable means to make the Bush Doctrine effective. The stunning victory in the war to remove Saddam has been followed by an almost equally stunning lack of seriousness about winning the peace, despite the vital importance of creating a stable, secure, and democratic Iraq. That is what the Bush Doctrine of "re-

gime change" means, or should mean: Not blowing out the bad regime and then leaving others to pick up the pieces, but staying long enough to ensure that a good regime can take its place.

But for that to happen, we need to defeat the increasingly dangerous Baathist and international terrorist groups operating in Iraq. There aren't enough American troops there today to conduct the kind of counterterrorist and counterinsurgency strategy that is needed. In an effort to compensate, the administration has pursued one illusory quick fix after another. First there was the illusion--now dispelled--that international troops would come in and substitute for American forces. With U.S. troops scheduled to rotate out of Iraq in March, Pentagon planners counted on the introduction of two new international divisions. This expectation was fanciful, as we pointed out two months ago. It was unlikely that many foreign forces were ever going to participate in the aftermath of a war their governments did not favor.

The second, more current and more dangerous illusion is that Iraqi forces can substitute for American forces during the dangerous and critical months ahead. Under the guise of transferring sovereignty to the Iraqi people, a necessary goal in political terms, the Pentagon is looking to reduce significantly the military burden on the United States and shift it onto the Iraqis, and the sooner the better. "It's their country," Rumsfeld says, as if the United States had only fleeting responsibilities in Iraq after invading it. But of course the reason Rumsfeld wants to pass the responsibility to Iraqis has nothing to do with whether they are ready or able to take on that responsibility. It is simply that he wants to bring the level of U.S. forces down.

Two months ago, when signs of deteriorating security in key parts of Iraq became unmistakable, the administration accelerated the enlistment of Iraqis into various security forces. We expressed concern at the time that the too hasty enlistment of Iraqis, some of whom served in Saddam Hussein's murderous security structure, risked alienating average Iraqis and, more significantly, risked putting unreliable people in positions to do great harm. We also questioned whether Iraqi forces could or should take on the task of fighting international terrorists and well-armed Baathist remnants. Two months and a few bombings later, a desperate Pentagon is accelerating the acceleration.

Consider this: In early September, Rumsfeld declared there were 55,000 Iraqis in security forces with another 50,000 planned for 2004. Now suddenly the numbers have doubled. 100,000 Iraqis are allegedly available today, with another 100,000 coming by next summer.

And what do these numbers mean? The Pentagon has been hammering the American provisional government in Baghdad to reduce training requirements for the Iraqi security forces so as to be able to point to rapidly increasing numbers of them, almost regardless (sources in Baghdad tell us) of the actual quality and utility of the training they are getting. It turns out that in order to get this many Iraqis ready for action, training schedules have been absurdly shortened--a 12-week police training program now miraculously takes only 2 weeks. It turns out the Americans don't even have enough weapons and uniforms for all the Iraqis they train. And it will almost certainly turn out to be the case that, as we hurriedly stand up these new Iraqi security forces, more Saddam loyalists will make it into their ranks.

Never mind the message it sends to the Iraqi people to put their old tormenters back on the streets to watch over them. How will we know whether the Iraqi recruits can be trusted not to carry out sabotage? Can American authorities possibly do background checks on so many Iraqis so quickly? Rumsfeld has an admirably frank answer to that question: No, they can't. He seems to believe it's a tolerable risk. It isn't. A few weeks ago, a car bomb was detonated next to an Iraqi police station. The car in which the bomb was rigged was itself a police car. How did a suicide bomber get hold of a police car? Probably, someone recruited by the United States was playing a double game. It takes only a couple of mistakes in background checks to have a disaster, and that assumes you're really conducting background checks. But such incidents will multiply as the hastily assembled and inadequately vetted Iraqi forces take the field.

The Pentagon's consistent denial that we need more troops in Iraq has become absurd. Occasionally, commanders slip and speak the truth. A few weeks ago, General Ricardo Sanchez noted that he had decided to step up operations against the guerrilla-terrorists in the Sunni triangle. To do so, he did the obvious: He increased the number of American troops deployed there. More recently, an American battalion commander noted that intelligence on terrorist actions had

improved in August and September. Why? Because the Iraqis in his sector "started to realize they could give us information and we would protect them." How? With lots of American troops visible and readily available to do the protecting. Will Iraqis feel the same confidence if our troops retreat to their garrisons and hastily trained and poorly equipped Iraqi forces take their place?

The president has publicly dedicated his administration to keeping U.S. forces in place as long as necessary to build a democratic Iraq. It would be helpful if the Pentagon implemented a strategy consistent with the president's stated goals. Or we can cross our fingers and just hope it all works out. But that's an irresponsible risk to take. Failing in Iraq would be a strategic calamity worse than America's retreat from Vietnam 30 years ago. As Senator John McCain put it this week, the only acceptable exit strategy is victory. The president calls our effort in Iraq "a massive and difficult undertaking." It is that, and it is also a necessary and admirable one. The question is whether Bush will see to it that his Pentagon does what it takes to make that undertaking succeed.

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