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The War in Iraq: A Personal View of an Ethical Dilemma

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Abstract

The war in Iraq has spiraled into a non-winnable operation consisting of domino effect strategies. The war was an ill concept from the beginning and has led to ethical dilemmas affecting not only the Army but Soldiers as well. We as a nation, is on a cross road of whether to abandon the fight to save the many lives of our Soldiers or to stay because abandoning Iraq will lead to exploitation by terrorist groups. If we are to continue with our resolve, we must implement drastic changes to our current strategies.

The War in Iraq: A Personal View of an Ethical Dilemma

The United States Army under the order of the President waged an assault on Iraq in March of 2003. The President with the wisdom of Congress mulled over the invasion of Iraq. The President was able to acquire the backing of the people through intense persuasion that Iraq is a rogue nation-state with the capability of producing weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Our country was divided, but the memory of September 11 was still fresh in the hearts and minds of the populace. In order to get public support, a false rationale was devised. As a Soldier and a member of the populace, I felt that there was an ulterior motive to the invasion which had nothing to do with the premise of WMD. As the years past and the truths unraveled, later accounts of government officials involved in the preparation of invasion who have resigned their positions or who have retired and appearances before the Senate committee of other government officials, insinuated that the invasion was a mistake. The strategy of invading and occupying Iraq was flawed. The war should have been waged full force in Afghanistan. The war should have been more focused on the capture of Osama Bin Laden, who has repeatedly abhorred and authored a “Jihad” against the United States.

As a Soldier, I took an oath to defend the Constitution and to follow the orders of the United States President and the officers appointed over me. I am a Soldier and will continue to do what I am asked to do. By virtue of this, I’m not allowed to degrade the President who is my Commander in Chief. Therefore, I asked in advance that this paper should be taken as a mere opinion rather than as an act of defiance.

An ethical dilemma arises when two moral imperatives collide. A moral imperative are principles that a person holds true in their heart and what makes a person act the way they do. Taking these concepts and applying them to the Army in reference to the war in Iraq, infers that the Army is facing an ethical dilemma in many ways than one. The war in Iraq has spiraled into a war that isn't winnable for the simple fact that the Army has lost site of the true mission thus strategy after strategy is a mere result of a domino effect.

The National Security Strategy

The most current national security strategy which is the basis of the national military strategy and the quadrennial review, states that the defeat of terrorism is contingent upon two key elements and will require four steps to be taken in short term for the deep-rooted outcome to take hold. The first pillar is based on democratic advocacy in which freedom and justice can co-exist without diminishing the essence of humanity. The second pillar is to confront challenges of our time by taking the lead in growing communities of democracy through averting terrorist attacks beforehand, renouncing rouge nation-states and terrorist allies' ability to acquire WMD, depriving terrorist of the assistance of and using rouge nation-states as a platform for terrorism, and preventing any terrorist from controlling any nation and use it as their platform.

The National Military Strategy

The military strategy in support of the above states that we can't depend solely on the employment of armed forces but we as a nation must account the support that our allies and other coalition partners can provide because in the long run, it will require for military, information, diplomatic, intelligence, and economic to win current operations.

The Bush Administration

In my opinion, the above is and should have been the strategy used towards Iraq and such other countries deemed axis of evil or platform for terrorist groups, instead of the Bush administration using the 2002 national security strategy and stretching the truths to support its own personal agenda. The 2002 national strategy allows in vague terms, the United States the right to attack any country of choice, since the document only required an “intent and ability” to develop weapons of mass destruction. Iraq wasn’t the only nation-state that could have capability for WMD, but it is the only nation-state that has long demeaning reminder of the legacy of the Bush’s patriarch George H. Bush. It’s also the nation-state with the riches of oil reserve that will cement the future of the right-wing, nationalistic, conservative, Republicans to support the rich, capitalistic big business interests instead of the democratic people of United States. Thus, an invasion of Iraq was conducted in March of 2003 in the name of Iraq as the hot bed for WMD.

Years past and it showed that the invasion in itself was a huge mistake, a flawed strategy thus an ethical dilemma was born. The government officials who made the decision to occupy Iraq misjudged the success of the containment and underestimated the task. They failed to plan for post-war reconstruction and stabilization. Now, we are in a stand still of whether the Army is to continue the occupation of Iraq. The objective has been blurred and obviously there is no winnable solution. Every the life of our very own Soldiers are at stake, if not taken away. Should we continue to stay because the military strategy now states that we will not abandon “them” before the transition is secure? If the United States abandons the current operation, Iraq with its immature democracy, can be prone to conflict and will be vulnerable to exploitation by terrorist. “Can” is a late

assessment. In fact it has been exploited by terrorist groups because the same groups grabbed the window of opportunity that we failed to capture.

The Dilemma and Effects

The dilemma didn't only affect the international relationship of United States; it divided our nation, and created personal dilemmas among Soldiers but also in the recruiting and retention of United States Army. The United States image has been smeared. It has been taunted as the devil, the occupier, the axis of evil, and the true infidel. Stand-ins, sit-downs, and demonstrations of both sides are prevalent in the media. Our Congress continues to disagree with measures and courses of actions thus creating a division within our government which affect the well-being of the Soldiers whose life is ever on the line. Soldiers have been deployed not once but majority more than twice. The pressure has been so overwhelming that increases in divorce and suicide for the past few years had escalated and continue to escalate. Many Soldiers have used different resources to avoid deployment orders from separation due to homosexuality, drug abuse, medical situation, inability to conduct family member's affairs to pregnancy. These separations are ethical dilemmas that Soldier had faced since the onset of the war in Iraq. Just as Soldiers faced ethical dilemmas of whether to deploy or take care of their family affairs, the chain of command faces similar dilemma of separating Soldiers for these occurrences knowing that some of them are just using these separations to be with their family. The war has also created a new ideology in which Soldiers have requested separation due to conscientious objection – meaning their religion or belief is in contradiction with the Army values. Should the military allow the separation of qualified Soldiers based on these discharges or not, since these Soldiers are needed? Moreover, the war in Iraq has

created a huge void in the retention and recruiting of qualified Soldiers to fill the fox hole. Ethical dilemmas occur each time a commander takes a different approach in retaining Soldiers. Should the commander suspend favorable actions on Soldiers merely because of body fat composition or physical fitness failure? Should the Army use the “stop-loss” program that allows Soldiers to be retained past their authorized contract or qualification in lieu of deployment? The demands of the war and other conflicts have been attributed to the lax standards for recruiting as well. For the past years, the standards have been lowered to allow the Army to attain its recruiting goal. The Army has increased the age requirement from 37 to 42 years of age. In addition, it has lowered the aptitude standard by allowing category IV (applicants who scored 10-30 percent; the average is 31-64 percent) to enter the military. By virtue of this, it has also increased the number of waiver approval for not so standard moral character of applicants. The effect of these lax requirements is slowly being manifested into rogue Soldiers in the formation as verified by numerous articles on gang related violations to violent acts toward superiors. Maybe it is a coincidence but it is easy to infer that you reap what you sow? What type of a future Army are we shaping?

To date, there have been more than 3,700 Soldiers and approaching the 4,000 mark who have died in the name of freedom and democracy. Recent news reports stated that 2007 is the deadliest year for the Army and two more months remain. The United States is the most powerful, highly trained, and most lethal Armed Forces in the world. It has the most advanced technology that no other country can compare. Yet, it can't win over the simplest form of the terrorist tactics which is the employment of improvised explosive devices. The Army deployed thousands of Soldiers and deployed more to

support the “surge”, yet even this strategy hasn’t accomplished what it was supposed to accomplish. The surge did flush out some of the insurgents out of Baghdad, but the same insurgents are now based far up North. I spent an entire year in al Qayyarah region of Iraq and was told before deployment that it is a pretty calm place. I beg to differ. The attacks had dramatically increased since the surge. Soldiers conduct series of large-scale raids from night to day patrols to seized weapon caches, decimate insurgent strongholds and prevent factions from taking a foot-hold of towns, but only to find them regrouped. We miscalculated their resolve and tenacity. The allies can’t be distinguished from the adversaries. They attack in their own time, in a place their choosing and only to be lost in the populace afterwards. The harder we counter their attack, the stronger and clever they become. Collateral damages are unavoidable and leads to another dilemma. The outcome is populace support of the martyrdom. The situation in Iraq has turned into a counter-insurgency operation and in short, a code for un-winnable war.

Implement new strategies

Leaving Iraq at this time will not be beneficial; it will be an utter failure. The military must stabilize the government of Iraq through Iraq’s own political body. Our Army must take a back stance and only provide necessary assistance if need be. The strategy of winning their hearts through building an economy that is conducive to free market should be implemented. Employ every effort to provide a developed economy to combat poverty and prevent its people from susceptibility of choosing between livelihoods or employing impoverished explosive device because it pays better. Build the infrastructure to produce more jobs. We have to contain Iraq through explicitly monitoring its borders, or close it if necessary. The strategy to counter the terrorist attack must be continued since it has

metastasized and will continue to be the challenge to not just our security but the world as a whole. Increase media coverage and psychological strategy by showing the desirability of countries that were once predominantly Islamic and were able to find a medium to incorporate their way of life with a democratic republic for instance Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Bahrain, Tunisia, Lebanon, Brunei, and Jordan to name a few.

Lastly, we need to implement three specific concepts of winning the war on counter-insurgency. These concepts were proven effective with the United States Army's war against the Philippine insurgents. First, we need to keep the fight at the local level. This means that we need to have innovative and flexible leaderships down at the very bottom of the echelon. We need to eliminate the bureaucratic policy making and allow the local leadership to employ strategies that are conducive to their area of responsibility. Let the Washingtonians handle what they are best for, supporting the fight through approval of monetary support. In the Philippines, tactics that were implemented in the Luzon province weren't appropriate for the Moro province. Same concept can be surmise for the al-Qayarrah regions and Basra. It doesn't mean that what worked for al-Qayarrah will work for Basra. Secondly, we need to "go native". For counterinsurgency to prevail, it is highly dependent on the support that it acquires from the indigenous population whether through policies of attraction or chastisement as evident during the counterinsurgency in the Philippines. While deployed to the Northern region of Iraq, the 25th Infantry Division Commander employed some type of carrots and sticks policy. Winning the hearts and the minds of the locals was the foundation of the strategy. In the Philippines, the Northern region was easier to pacify than the Moro region. Similarly in Iraq, the Kurdistan region was a lot easier to befriend than the Sunni Triangle. Third, the real strategic center of

gravity is the American public support and the resolve of both the American people and the Soldiers. We, as a nation must unite and support the Soldiers fighting in Iraq. We must face the fact that this is a protracted war. Complacency and disagreements will only be our defeat.

Conclusion

The war in Iraq may have been a product of an ill political agenda in which the Bush administration created a false reasoning for the invasion and public support, but setting that aside, the military can't leave Iraq on these grounds. The war in Iraq has evolved into a volatile political situation that will be a precedence of a pervading haven of terrorist groups. The terrorist must not win. Stabilizing Iraq is critical in the relationship of the Middle East. Its instability will create an undesirable domino effect within that region that will be emulated by other cells in other countries. Staying in Iraq ensure its stability which is the key to the equanimity in that region and the demise of the terrorist groups. Most importantly, we can't allow letting the lives of those great American Soldiers who sacrificed their all to go in vain!

References

All knowledge is either from personal experiences of the author or deemed common knowledge.