

Stay the Course

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Stay the Course

Matt Lauer of the *Today Show* interviewed a group of soldiers live at Camp Liberty in Baghdad on August 17th 2005 about the state of morale in the Iraqi War. After receiving a positive response from American soldiers, Lauer continued to say "I think you guys are telling me the truth, but there might be a lot of people at home wondering how that could be possible with the conditions you're facing and with the insurgent attacks you're facing, so what would you say to those people who are doubtful that morale can be that high?" Captain Sherman Powell retorted "Well, Sir, I'd tell you, if I got my news from the newspapers also I'd be pretty depressed as well."¹ The growing number of American casualties, failure to produce weapons of mass destruction, and perceived low morale have resulted in the Presidency and United States military coming under media attack. Despite opponent arguments of the cost of war, that forcing democracy is not the solution, and that the U.S. is only instilling fear, the U.S. military must remain aggressive against terrorism in Iraq to protect American shores, move towards Middle Eastern stability, and honor United States' commitments.

Background

Welcome to the Occupation, reviewed by Gideon Rose, highlights the road to war and the current state of Iraq. The United States' strategic goals in Iraq were to destroy an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, break the link between Iraq and terrorism, and build democracy in Iraq.² The U.S. additionally sought to maintain American safety at home through stability in the Middle East. Military operational goals were to seize Baghdad, capture Saddam Hussein, route out Hussein loyalists, and begin the rebuilding of a democratic Iraq. Although operational goals were achieved, U.S. strategic goals fell short. Weapons of mass destruction were never found, no clear tie was made between Sadaam and terrorism, and a new democracy, which is far from stable, has come at a high cost. Additionally, U.S. actions may have unintentionally opened Iraq to more terrorists and terrorist activities. For example, regardless of possible terrorist ties between Al Qaeda and Iraq before the war, relations between Al Qaeda and Iraqi terrorist groups led by Al Zargawi exist now. Throughout the course of Global War on Terrorism, Operation Iraqi Freedom has shifted from conventional to guerilla/insurgent warfare and continues to gain momentum for a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.

Opponents' Arguments for Withdrawal

Opponents suggest remaining in Iraq has become too costly. The cost of war since Operation Iraqi Freedom began has totaled over 200 billion dollars and continues to grow. The death toll of American troops similarly continues to grow and has exceeded two thousand casualties.³ Parallels have been drawn between the current Iraq war and Vietnam where violent guerrilla warfare killed countless American soldiers falling short of a decisive victory. Opponents argue that with America's own domestic economic shortfalls and the continuing sacrifice of American soldiers, the U.S. can no longer afford the war in Iraq and must leave.

Committing U.S. resources now, however, prevents an even costlier price tag. Because Iraq supplies oil exports essential to America's natural resource consumption, Middle Eastern political stability directly correlates to a more stable oil reserve. A price tag on oil however, is worth far less than the price of an American soldier. American sacrifices on the other hand, are far better than American civilian casualties from another terrorist strike against the U.S. where civilians are specifically targeted. The strike on 9/11 killed more than three thousand people in a single day. Allowing terrorism to breed in Iraq will strengthen terrorist networks and make the U.S. prone to further attacks. While no loss of American life

is acceptable, U.S. military pledges to protect and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and military members must be allowed to execute that vow for the safety of all Americans.

Opponents of U.S. intervention in Iraq also argue that Iraq does not want a U.S. military presence and that forcing the U.S.'s ideology on Iraq will not solve the problems of a nation that has been in continual conflict. However, the Iraqi populace at large is pleased with U.S. intervention and continues to show support. Captain Jeffery McCormack, a U.S. Marine Intelligence Officer in Iraq, stated that "In a land of 28 million people, if they [Iraqi citizens] didn't want us there, we wouldn't be there."⁴ Air Force Captain Denise Emery noted that, while serving in Iraq, Iraqi citizens would part the street for U.S. soldiers out of respect.⁵ To date, American efforts have helped rebuild countless schools, hospitals and medical facilities.

Additionally, the ratification of the Iraqi constitution in 2005 and their continual parliamentary elections make it clear that U.S. soldiers are not instilling fear into the Iraqi people, but rather giving them hope. Despite terrorist warnings about bombings and assassinations should the Iraqi people step forward and vote, the Constitution was ratified and elections continue to move forward. U.S. actions do not seek to solve all

Iraqi problems; instead, they seek to give the Iraqi's the ability to solve their own problems and set Iraq up for success.

Proponent Views to Stay the Course

Although U.S. efforts in Iraq have not been producing the intended results, U.S. forces have kept terrorist strikes away from American shores since September 11th 2001. Pre 9/11, the U.S. military involvement in the Middle East was geared towards balancing peace through diplomacy and sanctions, not intense military action. However, terrorist groups evolved over time and formed a network of terrorism. Without direct military presence or pressure, terrorist groups planned and carried out tragic strikes like the 9/11 attack against the U.S. in 2001 and the attack in Bali, Indonesia in 2002. The U.S. decision to attack Iraq, while continuing operations against terrorism in Afghanistan, forced terrorist groups into a defensive posture and gave U.S. forces a distinct advantage.

Direct military action against terrorist groups, away from American shores and at the heart of terrorist cells, has been vital in protecting the U.S. from further attacks. Marine Corps Doctrine Publication 1-0 defines the importance of gaining initiative and forcing the enemy to fight at a time and place of U.S. choosing. Continuing to stay the course, the U.S. is positioned to exploit an operational advantage and must maintain

the initiative. Marine Corps maneuver warfare doctrine shapes the enemy to reduce friction and uncertainty for friendly forces while at the same time increasing friction and uncertainty for the enemy. For example, aggressive U.S. military involvement greatly restricted Al Qaeda's freedom of movement and Bin Laden and Al Zargawi have been in hiding since the beginning of the war. As a result, their sphere of influence is limited and they are increasingly unable to conduct a two front war. Although terrorist attacks do still occur on a global scale, U.S. military success in the Middle East has significantly reduced terrorist operations.

Stability in the Middle East is vital for American safety and democracy is a key component. To stay the course and protect America, it is paramount that the U.S. continues military support until a capable Iraqi government exists. Democracy creates a government that can evolve and support change. Unlike a dictatorship, born of an individualized ideology, a democracy incorporates a group ideology and instills nationalism. For example, the prosperity of current democratic states coupled with the collapse of the communist Soviet Union illustrates that democracy works and is prone for growth and understanding throughout a nation. The continual balance of ideas and compromise within a society creates a more stable government with less strife amongst other nations. As a result

of democratic leadership, new opportunities are born for a greater majority and economic strength continually grows.⁶ With a stable government born from a united voice, democracy can reward Iraqi citizens with economic relief, jobs, security and a life without constant fear of death.

The U.S must remain committed and follow through with its intentions of helping the Iraqi people to gain legitimacy and achieve a stable democracy. When U.S. forces set foot on foreign soil to dethrone the Saddam regime and help build a nation of opportunity, the President and the U.S. Congress publicly stressed a committed U.S. response that would not falter, warned that this commitment was not taken lightly, and stated it may take time. Leaving Iraq short of meeting strategic objectives would create justified hostility toward the U.S. and would reflect negatively on all American citizens. Poor world opinion of the United States, should the U.S. not be allowed to accomplish the mission, would become legitimate and existing ties with other nations would weaken.

Conclusion

The "fog of war" does not lend itself to easy solutions, predictable outcomes, and guaranteed timelines. Military tactical objectives may be easily identifiable when achieved, however national strategic objectives are not finite and success

or failure is left open to interpretation. War is paid with money and sacrifice of American soldiers. Although the cost is great, the safety gained for America and the selfless obligation to the Iraqi populace allows the U.S. to take and maintain the moral high ground. War is not a tactical mission rather a strategic obligation that takes times. Building democracy is vital to that obligation and will be successful in time. Opposing arguments that the Iraq war has become too costly and that democracy will not work are impatient views not allowing the process of war to fully evolve and conclude. Despite opposition, the U.S. must stay the course to protect America's safety, further Middle Eastern stability, and remain true to a committed response.

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Notes Page

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