

## Step by step...In or Out? # 2

By

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The Bush administration has reaffirmed not only the policy of carrying the war to the Iraqi insurgents, using whatever level of force that requires, but also the policy of “preëmption,” that is, carrying the war wherever it believes overt or covert forces are gathering to harm American interests. In short, it proclaims that it intends to escalate -- to move further “in.”

However, doubt that it really will (or even can) carry through such policies appears to be increasing not only among its adversaries but also among its senior officials. A top-secret report from the C.I.A. station chief in Baghdad, sent on Monday, November 10, which was leaked to several reporters in Washington, warned that growing numbers of Iraqis are now convinced that America is losing the war there, losing that is, despite President Bush’s proclamation on May 1, that the war was over.

Senior Americans in Baghdad, apparently including both intelligence officers and even the head of the Provisional authority, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, are reported to agree with their adversaries: the American position is deteriorating. That is apparently the message that Ambassador Bremer rushed back to Washington on Tuesday to deliver.

Ambassador Bremer’s report must have been unwelcome to the Washington “hawks” who have consistently argued that the Iraqis welcomed the American intervention and that America was winning the war. Even more unwelcome is likely to be the assessment of the Americans on the ground that a further escalation of the announced “get tough” American policy will drive more Iraqis into the resistance.

Iraq is a small country, but already over a quarter of a million men (half Iraqi and half American) are devoted to creating “security” at a cost of over \$5 billion a month. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the military costs alone for the coming decade, even if the number of troops is drastically cut, at \$200 billion. Doubling the number of American troops (and the cost of employing them) and using even more lethal weapons -- as American forces are now beginning to do – are unlikely to succeed.

If the situation continues to deteriorate and attacks – already said to be about 30-35 daily – result in an increasing number of American casualties with no “light at the end of the tunnel,” some of President Bush’s advisers will presumably begin to explore an alternative policy. That is how, without an unacceptable loss of face, can America find a way out?

Based on my personal familiarity with Iraq, going back half a century, and my experience as the principal planner of American policy in the Middle East during the Kennedy administration, I believe that sooner rather than later, American officials will have to adopt the following:

First, because many Iraqis believe America intends to turn their country into a colony, the American government must announce a date by which it will withdraw. The American-picked “Governing Council,” operating under American control, was already seen, according to a Gallup poll taken three months ago, as proof that America intends to rule Iraq much as the British did, behind a façade. Only if the Iraqis can be convinced that America will get out, will at least some of the opposition decline. “Devolution” is the key word. It can be accomplished in a speedy but phased manner with the United Nations covering the interim as power devolves to the Iraqis.

Second, related to the Iraqi belief that America has long-term designs on their country is control of petroleum. Forty-three percent of those recorded in the Gallup poll thought America planned “to rob Iraq’s oil.” Not only Iraqis but many other peoples now believe America went into Iraq not to destroy dangerous weapons, stop terrorism or overturn a vicious government but mainly because of oil. Oil is Iraq’s only significant national asset; no Iraqi government can survive if it gives away control of that asset. America must categorically affirm that its only role will be commercial: it will buy Iraqi oil just as it buys oil from other countries.

Third, partly related to the issue of petroleum is that of rebuilding Iraq. Using Iraq as a means to enrich American companies, even if the American taxpayers pay the bill, now estimated at upwards of half a trillion dollars, serves to convince Iraqis that America is creating interests that will prevent it from leaving.

Fourth, only as Iraq begins to develop national political institutions can its security force, now said to number about 130 thousand, be seen as truly “native.” Merely enrolling Iraqis in an American-run army will not suffice. However, native troops are perhaps less provocative than foreign troops. Americans should remember their own history: the presence of British troops in Boston was one of the triggers that fired the American revolution. American unilateralism, the policy of the Bush administration, is politically untenable. As rapidly as possible, foreign troops should be withdrawn; in the meantime, they should be put under genuine (not “coalition”) international control.

In summary, the keys to ending the costly, bloody and unwinnable guerrilla war must include American commitment to get out, phased devolution of political power to a recognizably Iraqi regime, probably through an interim United Nations administration,

and affirmation that neither American designs on Iraqi oil or American commercial interests will be allowed to dominate Iraqi affairs.

To accomplish these transformations will require careful timing, subtle understanding of Iraqi feelings and a transparent American commitment. Unless they are speedily and sincerely undertaken, the guerrilla war will continue and almost certainly will get worse. Repression – “getting tough” – has never worked. It will not work in Iraq. The question is ‘will America change course in time to avoid both a tragedy and a humiliation?’ That is a question only President Bush can answer.

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