

Who Will Stop The Next War?

If Americans sickened by the carnage of Iraq wish to stop an even more disastrous war on Iran, they had best get cracking.

For the “On-to-Baghdad!” boys are back, warning us that the only way to prevent an atom bomb from being detonated in an American city is to attack and destroy Iran’s nuclear sites. And the forces needed to execute an attack are moving into place. Army Gen. John Abizaid has been replaced as CENTCOM commander by Adm. “Fox” Fallon, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, who knows little about counterinsurgency but a lot about co-ordinating air strikes.

The carrier group *Stennis* is headed for the Gulf to join the *Eisenhower*. Minesweepers are headed for the Strait of Hormuz. American fighter-bombers have returned to Incirlik. Iranian officials have been seized in Iraq. Patriot missiles are being moved into Kuwait and Qatar. Why all this firepower—to secure Anbar province and Sadr City?

Bush’s anti-Iran rhetoric has been ratcheted up. Announcing his surge, Bush interjected that Tehran “is providing material support for attacks on American troops. ... [W]e will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq.” This threat was followed by shoot-to-kill orders to U.S. troops encountering Iranians aiding the insurgency.

And Democrats are not going to let Bush get to their right. At the Herzliya Conference, John Edwards said that keeping Iran from nuclear weapons “is the greatest challenge of our generation.” “To ensure that Iran never gets nuclear weapons, we need to keep all options on the table. Let me reiterate—all options.”

At AIPAC, Hillary echoed Edwards: “In dealing with this threat ... no option

can be taken off the table. ... We need to use every tool about our disposal including ... the threat and use of military force.”

To Mitt Romney, this was wimpish. For Hillary had said she favors “engagement” with Iran. Roared Romney to Hill Republicans, “[W]e don’t need a listening tour about Iran. ... Someone who wants to engage Iran displays a troubling timidity toward a terrible threat of a nuclear Iran.”

Anybody think that Giuliani and McCain will let Edwards, Hillary, or Mitt be more menacing toward Tehran than they?

Consider the correlation of forces behind a new war.

If Bush goes home with Iran’s nuclear program not shut down, his legacy will be Iraq and a failed presidency. The Bush Doctrine—no nukes in rogue states—will have been defied by Pyongyang and Tehran.

Israel wants Iran attacked yesterday. The neocons need a new war to make America forget the disaster that they wrought in Iraq. Democratic candidates must be seen as hawkish as Giuliani and McCain. And the deadline for Iran to comply with UN Security Council directives to halt its enrichment of uranium is Feb. 23. What then is holding us back from war?

It is the realization, even on the part of the noisiest hawks, that war on Iran could precipitate a disaster worse than defeat in Iraq. A Shia uprising against U.S. troops could turn the Green Zone into Dien Bien Phu. Attacks on tankers and pipelines could send oil to \$200 a

barrel. America would have no international support and would receive virtually universal condemnation.

And like the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, bombing Iran could unite Iranians behind their rulers. Shia insurgencies could be ignited against Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Hezbollah could bring down the Lebanese government and attack Americans in the Middle East and perhaps here in the United States.

And what would an attack accomplish besides setting back an Iranian nuclear-enrichment program that by most reports is a bust?

What is the threat? Iran has no missiles that can reach us, no atom bombs. Though the Mullahs have been in power 27 years, they have yet to launch their first war. The war they fought was in self-defense. They can no more want a Sunni-Shia regional war than we, for they would be in the isolated minority. They want the Taliban kept out of Kabul and Iraq to remain united under a Shia majority, as do we.

It is said that we cannot negotiate with men responsible for the Khobar Towers. But Bush negotiated with Muammar al-Gaddafi, who was responsible for Pan Am 103, and Gaddafi agreed to forego nuclear weapons. Sanctions were lifted and relations restored.

If FDR can talk to Stalin, and Nixon to Mao, and Bush to the North Vietnamese (who tortured John McCain), why can’t we talk to Mullahs who held 52 Americans hostage for a year?

Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.) has introduced a resolution declaring that in the absence of an imminent threat or an attack upon us from Iran, President Bush has no authority to attack Iran.

Next step: get Chuck Hagel and Jim Webb to sign on. ■

What If We Leave?

When nightmare scenarios are used to justify endless war, it's time to wake up.

By John Mueller

IT IS CONTINUALLY proclaimed that an American withdrawal from Iraq would carry grim consequences. President Bush calls it a “nightmare scenario,” and Frederick Kagan predicts “catastrophe.” Few Democrats disagree: House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer warns that “precipitous withdrawal ... could lead to disaster, spawning a civil war, fostering a haven for terrorists and damaging our nation’s security and credibility.”

Indeed, the aftermath of withdrawal would be problematic and messy—like the present war—but it might not be as dire as increasingly desperate war supporters maintain.

The least persuasive scenario—but the one most likely to arrest the attention of Americans—is that Iraq will be taken over by international terrorists who would use it as a “safe haven” to “launch attacks on America,” as the president put it in an interview on “NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” in January.

Since al-Qaeda already has something of a safe haven in the unruly areas of Pakistan, it is not clear how adding space in Iraq would be of notable help. Moreover, international terrorism is essentially a conspiratorial enterprise carried out by tiny cells of plotters who can operate anywhere. Insofar as the 9/11 planners needed a safe haven, they found it in Hamburg, Germany, while those in London, Indonesia, Morocco, Madrid, and elsewhere were locals whose cells were based in their home countries and whose physical connection to the international jihadist move-

ment was limited at best. Furthermore, in the wake of a U.S. exit, Iraqis are unlikely to tolerate the continued presence of foreign fighters (who make up only a very small portion of the insurgency) because these adventurers have mostly spent their time killing Iraqis and because, for better or worse, their key mission will have been accomplished.

More plausibly, America’s exit from Iraq will exhilarate international terrorists because victory over the U.S. will seem even greater to them than victory over the Soviets in Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden’s theory that Americans can be defeated, or at least productively inconvenienced, by inflicting comparatively small but continuously draining casualties on them will achieve apparent confirmation.

But that one is already lost: almost any exit from Iraq will have this effect. People like bin Laden believe that America invaded Iraq as part of its plan to control the Middle East’s oil and dominate the world—a perspective that polls suggest is enormously popular in Muslim countries as well as in such non-Muslim ones as Germany and France. The U.S. does not intend to do that—at least not in the direct sense bin Laden and others allege—nor does it seek to destroy Islam, as many others around the world bitterly assert. Such people will see almost any kind of American withdrawal as a victory for the terrorist insurgents, to whom they will give primary credit for forcing America to leave without accomplishing what they mistakenly take to be its key objectives.

Moreover, jihadists may be inclined to draw a special lesson by comparing the results of 9/11 with those of the Iraq War: it is much more productive to hit the “far enemy” when it comes near than to hit it in its homeland. That is, if their goal is to get the U.S. out of the Middle East, it is better for jihadists to cause it damage in places where its interests are limited rather than in places where its interests are vital. Thus, even if the result of the Iraq War exhilarates some terrorists, it would not necessarily whet their appetites for another 9/11.

After the American venture in Iraq is over, freelancing jihadists who trained there may seek to continue their operations elsewhere, like the jihadists who fought alongside the mujahideen against the Soviets in Afghanistan. If those experiences are any indication, however, the impact of these adventurers may not prove terribly significant. Following the example of their predecessors in Algeria, Chechnya, and Bosnia, they will most likely end up offering marginal reinforcement to rebel forces in places like Kashmir, Somalia, and Afghanistan. They might also try making trouble in their home countries, like Saudi Arabia, if they can manage to get back.

Whatever happens with the freelancers, the civil war in Iraq may become worse after the United States withdraws. But the ranks of the anti-American insurgency will be significantly reduced because those committed to forcing out the occupiers will presumably stop engaging in violence when their main