

# CHANGING THE DEBATE ON IRAQ

BY CHARLES HILLESTAD

Unless the shape of the debate changes soon, it looks like the earliest our troops will realistically be allowed to hope for getting out of the mistake known as Iraq is the day George W. Bush is removed from office or whatever day the amoebas in Congress finally grow a spine. Unfortunately, the Democrats have allowed themselves to be foolishly boxed into a "debate" defending against the assertion that anything ending the fiasco is somehow not "supporting" the troops.

Bush and his NeoCons have once again conned the nation into a non-sequitur. What the anti-Iraq quagmire activists need to do is change the question. How to do that? Are there any challenges or demands that can be made (besides the obviously useful impeachment alternative) that might assist? Actually there are several in which Bush's own rhetoric can be successfully used against him. How about:

## ALTERNATIVE 1: LET'S VOTE

Yeah. I know. We thought we already did last November. But, apparently it was not explicit enough on the question of Iraq. If so, it would be pretty easy to organize a special election, a national plebiscite solely on the subject whether to (a) leave now or (b) stay until our soldiers run out of blood or our treasury runs out of money, whichever comes first. Consider it as a national 'No Confidence Vote' that European nations have turned into a proud and useful tradition. Let's ask Bush and Cheney to resign if they cannot persuade a majority of voters that Western Civilization itself is riding on us staying in Iraq forever. If Bush truly has confidence in what he is telling us, ask him why not put it to a vote?

Of course, since we already know Bush is totally opposed to democracy here in the States and is too cowardly to really debate the subject, that will never happen. (In fact, it might even prove counterproductive given how Bush's minions, like the owner of Diebold voting machines, seem to magically achieve voting totals which defy logic and evidence when there is no paper trail to check against.) But, Bush *does* loudly and frequently claim he's at least for spreading "democracy" in the Middle East. So let's let the Iraqis give us the purple finger as to whether they want us to remain.

Why should Bush consider agreeing? He can continue pouring our assets down that rat hole until the end of his term assuming he is not removed by impeachment. On the other hand, he seems to worry about his "legacy" and has good cause to worry about post-term investigations. Frankly, it's a perfect solution for him. If the Iraqis vote to keep us as their guards, he wins the debate and can blunt criticism of him. If they vote for us to get out, he then has cover to pretend whatever later disaster happens is all the Iraqis' fault, not his own massive bungling.

If Bush won't consider an Iraqi vote or if the civil warring factions there would not allow it, how about demanding a UN General Assembly vote in which we agree not to exercise a veto and to abide by the result? Once again Bush, who surely knows he has already lost the war assuming he can read the reports from his own generals, can shrug his shoulders and say, "Well, I *would* have won, but I wasn't allowed to do so." Legacy saved, at least in his own mind.

## ALTERNATIVE 2: MAKE IT ALL VOLUNTEER TROOPS

Bush claims he "supports the troops" and touts the "all volunteer" army with which he likes to play toy general. While it is not true if almost everything learned about missing armor, extended tours, poor veterans care, rotten salaries and literally rotten food, etc., is accurate, nevertheless, let's insist he make Iraq an "all volunteer" mission. It used to be a tradition that when you sent troops on suicide or dangerous missions, volunteers were called for. If Bush believes so much in the mission, he can truly "support the troops" by saying they don't have to go to Iraq unless they feel the same way.



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Normally, in a real war, that would be a good idea, but most of our other wars have been fought for *valid* reasons in which there was a real and present danger from something other than tin-pot dictators we had put in power or a covetous desire for resources like oil. Consequently, let's give our boys and girls a choice as to whether they want to die in Iraq for Bush's ego, particularly when they are being asked to do so at a salary one-fifth what Bush and Cheney are paying Blackwater private mercenaries to do the same thing.

No doubt it will cost substantially more to bump soldier salaries sufficiently high enough to persuade them that putting Iraqi oil in Halliburton pockets is worth dying for. At the same time, wouldn't a significant increase in enlisted ranks compensation finally show some genuine "support" for the troops instead of the empty words Bush has been so fond of mouthing.

Better yet, how about initiating a draft of all those who voted in favor of the Iraq War, starting with Bush's military-age offspring? That way, we would not even have to raise salaries. They wanted the war, they get it.

Naturally, Bush will fight such a proposal, but doing so once again exposes him for the utter hypocrite he is and shifts the focus on which the issue is presently stuck.

## ALTERNATIVE 3: MAKE IT ALL VOLUNTEER FUNDING

Don't cut off the funds for the troops, but perhaps insist instead that they be paid for by those who want the war. Perhaps a line could be added to income tax returns in which citizens and

companies could specify how much they would *voluntarily* add to their tax burdens to fund the Iraq War. Bush could use these earmarked funds, but only those funds.

Oops, the big companies like Cheney's Halliburton don't pay much taxes. In fact, they are leaving for places like Dubai so they can pay even less. But since the war is really being fought to supply them with oil revenue (plus a lot of easy war profiteering), they may have to be assessed some new taxes if the Republicans want to continue their "Crusade," as Bush used to characterize it. Let them be asked to give back some of the billions they have stolen in graft, corruption, overcharging, insider trading and "bad accounting."

If that does not supply enough money due to the public finally wising-up or the corporations being too cheap to give back some of their obscene profits and obscene CEO salaries, perhaps Bush can hold a telethon or use some of the campaign contribution bribery and lobbying funds he has stashed away. The bottom line is let those who want the war foot the bills for it. If they don't, then use against them the same "unpatriotic traitor" mantra they call everyone else.

## ALTERNATIVE 4: ELIMINATE THE NEED FOR OIL

Basically demand the Prez prove that this is not really all about Oil by eliminating its consumption as fuel in this country. Demand immediate genuine progress be accomplished by launching, say, a massive 'Manhattan Project' or first 'Lunar Mission' urgency to end oil dependency before his Presidency ends. Ask that at least as much be spent on a useful alternative energy goal as has been spent on Bush's military adventurism. Perhaps a 100% tax on gasoline at the pump, a surtax on oil company profits, mandatory gas rationing as occurred in World War 2, elimination of restrictions on wind, wave, solar and other non-oil construction such as the suburban zoning height restrictions that prevent home wind generator towers, plus a huge research and development project on fuel cells and other helpful methods.

This would only indirectly be an impetus for getting the troops out of Iraq, but it would finally require the rest of the country to share some of the burden and sacrifice. Bringing the sacrifice home would remind the heads-in-the-sand public that something is going on for which they too have a responsibility. It broadens the debate.

## ALTERNATIVE 5: DEMAND STANDARDS BE SET FOR WHEN WE KNOW WE HAVE "WON" SO WE KNOW WHEN WE CAN FINALLY LEAVE

For instance, have we won and can get out if the death toll is dropped to, say, 25% of what it was last year? How about when the electricity in Iraq is on for at least 50% of the day at least six days a week? How about if the daily death toll and utility service is at least the same as the average for Mexico, Algeria or East Timor? Those are not very high standards to achieve. How about when reporters can report from anywhere and only 25 a year are killed attempting to do so?

If we cannot achieve even those very low standards, then we will never achieve higher ones and it is better to demand we get out now while we still have the shirts on our backs.

No standards — no continuing.

## ALTERNATIVE 6: DECLARE PEACE, NOT WAR

Although Bush rejects international law, signed treaties, precedent, tradition, the words of his oath of office and most of the Constitution, he *did* seek a "war resolution" to allow him to use force in Iraq. Repeat that resolution or alternatively recognize that the Constitution requires Congress, and Congress alone, to declare war. Read it sometime.

If there is no legal authorization for the troops being in Iraq, then leaving them there would be an illegal activity for which Bush could be impeached.

As to cutting off the funds for the war, Bush attempts to characterize that as an attempt to harm the troops. In fact, it is the opposite. If Bush insists on leaving them there, then he and he alone is responsible for whatever happens next. In fact, by military law, troops are required to refuse to obey illegal orders, which they would be if Bush ignores a demand for removal of the troops.

Cutting off the funds was necessary to finally end the war in Vietnam. Few now believe that troops were harmed as a result, and that proved to really be the only way to bring them home. To continue this war would be an utter waste.

## ALTERNATIVE 7: MOVE THE WHITE HOUSE TO THE "GREEN ZONE" IN BAGHDAD

Bush is always trying to show us how macho he is cutting brush, riding bikes, wearing flight suits. How about if he will not agree to any of the foregoing, double-dog dare him to move his personal base of operations, along with his VP, senior staff and Attorney General to Iraq. Ask him to show his own personal courage for once rather than the yellow streak he showed in the Vietnam War. He should be asked to show the troops he is behind them just a few miles away, not an entire hemisphere. Legacy-wise, Bush would be asked to put up or shut up.

If he inspires the troops like Custer did, great at least for him. He can go down in history as being proved right — far right. If he gets killed there, no big loss, and perhaps the Smithsonian, which is too close to the White House when someone finally does try a nuke, might be saved.

Bush can be reminded that if God is truly on his side as he proclaims, surely *He* will protect Bush. If not, then Bush can be happy he gets to go to his eternal reward even sooner.

One thing is for certain. We can do without G.W. Bush and his crew here for the next two years.

And if he doesn't want to discuss one of the alternatives above, we can always seek to truncate the tumor consuming the White House by reconsidering the monumental

## ALTERNATIVE 8: IMPEACHMENT.

Overtly rejecting *all* these other seven alternatives would prove Bush (once again) to be the Hypocrite-in-Chief and might be just the miracle growth tonic those in Congress need to either grow a backbone or conclude they will lose their cushy job next time around.

It is time to break out of the box if we are ever going to break out of Iraq.

## ASKING FOR PROOF CHALLENGING THE THEORY THAT WE MUST STAY IN IRAQ SO TERRORISM WON'T COME TO AMERICA

Republican diehard Bush supporters contend that if we pull out of Iraq, the insurgents we're fighting will follow us home and attack us here. The theory being, it is better to battle them "over there" than in the streets of Astoria or Portland. Just once, though, wouldn't it be nice if people making such assertions looked at history, facts or even logic before mouthing such platitudes?

For instance, can those who constantly parrot the Bush position point to a single example of that ever happening to us before? It doesn't seem to have occurred after any of our other wars in the last century or so. Where are the newspaper and textbook accounts of any demolitions, arsons, ambushes, or anything else conducted by defeated Nazis or Ninjas anywhere in North America. After we smashed their entire civilizations, they certainly had reason to seek revenge or punishment, not to mention the technical know-how to do so. Castro? North Koreans? They still don't like us after half a lifetime, but they didn't "follow us home." Castro is only 90 miles away.

Might it make a difference if we are the ones defeated or give up? Look at Lebanon in the '70s. When a Lebanese suicide truck-bomber blew up the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, Ronald Reagan hastily tucked his tail between his legs and slunk out of town. Clinton did much the same in Somalia after 'Blackhawk Down'. When was the last time you heard of a followup by either Lebanese or Somali Muslims on this continent afterwards?

Those were relatively isolated incidents. We left quickly after just one adverse confrontation. Does it make a difference if we leave after a long nasty conflict? Well, the Vietnam War was certainly comparable to what is happening in Iraq; more so all the time. We could look to it to see what might happen if we pulled out after essentially acknowledging either defeat or at least that it's not worth the cost. Almost everyone will admit the Viet Cong were tenacious, fierce insurgents who fought using terror tactics for literally decades. Name one example of where the victorious insurgents in that conflict followed us home.

Does it mean it is not possible? Of course not. The point is that Iraq insurgents could do so right now without having to

wait. Thanks to an Administration that acts on wishes, a remarkably incompetent Homeland Security agency and a cheapskate Congress, an almost porous border exists. Pregnant women can walk across the border almost at will. What makes anyone think that is a perfect defense against a stealthy terrorist? Worse, maybe one in 10,000 cargo containers docking in our ports is inspected. Put a nuke in any of them and a terrorist could touch off a bomb a few hundred feet from Wall Street. Hell, there is probably at least a one in ten chance that an unsuspected weapon could be flown in on a FedEx plane if asked to pick up a package. Consequently, the terrorists don't even need to come here.

Why haven't they attacked so far? Good question, but it does not seem to have anything to do with inability to get here. Perhaps part of the answer lies in the statistics on violence in Iraq. They seem to be killing more of each other than us. If we leave Iraq, is that likely to diminish so that they they could come after us alone? Is there any evidence of that in the past? Usually in similar situations, they seem to spend a long time fighting for power among themselves, then concentrating control once received and rebuilding after the consolidation. It typically takes years.

And what happens after the rebuilding that is distracting their attention and energy is finally successful? We could again look to our enemies in prior conflicts, whether Cold War or brush-fire war. Look at our bitter foe Vietnam. Communist Vietnam has now been granted favored nation trading partner status with state visits by none other than G. W. Bush himself.

Should we be sanguine about the possibility of future terrorist attacks here? Never! Yet, the next time a bellicose Republican starts spouting off about this particular justification for staying indefinitely as an occupying belligerent in Iraq, ask at least for an iota of proof. If not, let's bury this bit of nonsense. Otherwise, we might end up getting more of our people killed than we might save.

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