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Trapped in Lies and Delusions

by Jacob G. Hornberger

I could, of course, be proven wrong but my hunch is that the United States will be trapped in Iraq for the indefinite future. Despite the recent election results and increasing demand among the American people for a withdrawal, I believe that there is no possibility that President Bush is going to order a withdrawal any time soon. More likely than not, U.S. troops will continue to be sitting ducks for snipers and ambushers for at least the next two years.

But the world may well be witnessing the beginning of a political collision of colossal proportions — with the American people demanding withdrawal, on one side, and President Bush insisting on “staying but varying the course,” on the other. If so, the troops in Iraq, who have faithfully and loyally carried out their commander in chief’s orders to attack and occupy Iraq, will continue to pay the price at the hands of snipers and ambushers for at least the next two years.

Ask yourself: How in the world could President Bush, from a political standpoint, order the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq? For the past three years, he and Vice President Cheney have been suggesting that people who call for exiting Iraq are nothing more than weak-kneed cowards who would “cut and run” from the battlefield and subject the United States to terrorism.

Thus, by ordering a withdrawal from Iraq, would they not be implicitly admitting that they themselves had joined the ranks of the cut-and-run cowards who would put the nation at risk from the terrorists? Indeed, how would they explain a withdrawal to all the Iraqis who collaborated with the occupier and who would then be at the mercy of Iraqis who didn’t?

Worst of all, how would Bush explain the withdrawal to every American family that has lost a loved one in Iraq? No matter how hard each such family has tried to suppress it, a critically important question would inevitably surface within their consciousness: “What exactly did my son, daughter, spouse, or parent die for, Mr. President?” Indeed, those troops who have come back minus legs, arms, or eyesight or with some other permanent injury would inevitably ask that one-word question that we all asked as children: “Why?”

Let’s not forget that this is Bush’s and Cheney’s war and occupation. It was they who chose not to go to Congress for the constitutionally required declaration of war, no doubt convinced that

some sharp members of Congress would challenge their WMD justification for attacking Iraq. It was they who ultimately chose not to go to the United Nations for express authorization to wage war against a member country, no doubt convinced that they could not secure the required unanimous consent of the permanent members of the UN Security Council. It was they who decided not to give the UN inspectors more time to search for what turned out to be nonexistent WMDs. It was they who ignored and disregarded massive anti-war protests around the world. It was they who knew that as soon as they ordered the invasion, Americans would come on board through the skillful use of the “support the troops” mantra.

And the fact is that Bush and Cheney got exactly what they wanted, especially when they openly dared “the terrorists” to “bring it on.” They just miscalculated the depth of anger and hatred that people in the Middle East have for the United States after decades of U.S. government abuse and mistreatment of people in that part of the world.

Hanging over the Iraq debacle, however, is that one overriding moral issue that unfortunately all too many Americans have yet to confront: neither the Iraqi people nor their government ever attacked the United States or even threatened to do so. That means that in this conflict, which has killed more than 600,000 Iraqis, the United States is the aggressor nation and Iraq is the defending nation.

Why is that issue so important? Because it involves morality, not pragmatics. Do U.S. troops have the moral right to be killing people, when they are part of a military force that has aggressed against another country? Do they have the moral right to kill people who have done nothing worse than defend their nation from attack or attempt to oust an occupier from their midst? Does simply calling an action “war” excuse an aggressor nation from the moral consequences of killing people in that war?

In other words, does the United States have the moral right to violate the principles against aggressive war, for which it prosecuted Germany at Nuremberg and condemned the Soviet Union in Afghanistan?

By invading and occupying Iraq, Bush and Cheney have put the American people in the uncomfortable position of either supporting their government and its troops or supporting morality. Should a person support the actions of his government and its troops or should he obey the laws of God, when the government has placed its actions in contravention to those laws? What are the moral consequences for each individual faced with that choice?

Americans, quite naturally, want to continue believing that the federal government projects its power around the world just to help people. They want to believe that their government invaded Iraq just to help the Iraqi people — well, at least after the WMDs failed to materialize and that primary justification for the invasion fell by the wayside.

But it’s all a life of the lie — a life of self-imposed deception and delusion — a life that has refused for decades to confront the brutal and hypocritical role of the federal government in the

affairs of other nations, including ouster of democratically elected leaders (e.g., Mossadegh in Iran and Arbenz in Guatemala), assassinations and military coups (e.g., Vietnam and Chile), the support of brutal dictators (e.g., Saddam in Iraq, the Shah of Iran, and Musharraf in Pakistan), brutal and deadly sanctions and embargoes (e.g., Iraq and Cuba), foreign aid to socialist or authoritarian regimes (e.g., Israel and Egypt), the teaching of torture to Latin American military brutes at the School of the Americas, interference in the domestic affairs of other nations (e.g., Venezuela) under the guise of promoting “democracy,” and, of course, the far-flung secret empire of torture camps run by the CIA.

But the prospect of indefinite failure and continuous death might well cause people to face reality and cause them to confront the painful facts and truth about U.S. foreign policy. If my hunch is right — that is, if the United States is really trapped in Iraq for the indefinite future — then it is quite possible that the American people are about to be confronted by reality on an ever-increasing basis, especially as they begin to realize what Americans began realizing about the Vietnam War — that U.S. soldiers are killing and dying for nothing.

Of course, it is still impossible to predict how the Iraq debacle is going to play out. It's entirely possible that Bush and Cheney will get lucky and find a way out. But it is also possible that the debacle could prove to be one of monumental proportions, especially if the troops are trapped for the indefinite future in a daily cycle of snipers and ambushes and civil war, all to maintain a radical Islamic Shiite regime, which has aligned itself with Iran, in power. In fact, it is entirely possible that Bush and Cheney might just be presiding over the deadly dead end of the pro-empire, pro-intervention paradigm that has held our nation in its grip for so long.

If so, we can hope that that will cause the American people to come to the realization that the solution to the foreign-policy woes that afflict our country, including the threat of terrorism, is not simply a withdrawal from Iraq. The long-term solution instead involves returning to first principles — to our nation's founding principles of individual liberty, free markets, and a constitutional republic — principles that are contrary to our nation's current paradigm of militarism, standing armies, empires, foreign aid, foreign entanglements, foreign interventions, foreign wars, assassinations, coups, sanctions, and embargoes.

Mr. Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation. He is one of the 22 speakers at FFF's [upcoming conference](#) “Restoring the Republic: Foreign Policy and Civil Liberties” on June 1–4, 2007, at the Hyatt Regency Reston in Reston, Virginia.

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