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Our Patience on Iraq Should Be Exhausted **by Sheldon Richman**

President Bush started the fifth year of his war in Iraq by pleading with the American people for patience. Give the escalation (“surge”) a chance to work, he said. He sees signs of success already, but the Democrats in Congress are showing their impatience, with the House attaching a 2008 withdrawal deadline to the war appropriations bill and the Senate set to consider the same legislation.

In the discussion over whether the recent increase in troops will achieve the stated objective, the big picture is getting lost. Even most war critics in Congress seem to not fully see it. They routinely criticize the Bush administration for its incompetent execution of the war, but by doing so they have dropped the more important ball: regardless of how the war is being run, the invasion was illegal, unconstitutional, and contrary to the interests of the American people.

Americans are overwhelmingly unhappy with the war, but how would they feel if it seemed to be going well? The administration, it seems, believes that they would support it if they thought “America was winning.” That’s why they and their cheerleaders emphasize anything that looks like a glimmer of progress and denigrate the bringers of bad news. We’ve seen this tactic many times before.

But even if the war were “going well” it would be morally and politically objectionable. It must be viewed as one piece of an imperial program that has placed U.S. military bases in 130 countries, according to Chalmers Johnson, author of *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic*. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan mean more permanent bases. Hundreds of thousands of American military personnel are stationed all around the globe. House Republicans denounced the withdrawal deadline by arguing that it would endanger the U.S. troops in Iraq, Afghanistan, and “around the world.” About the only concern one hears expressed about this is that the military is stretched too thin to fight another war, perhaps against Iran.

When are ordinary Americans going to realize they are financiers and fodder for a worldwide empire? When will they demand an explanation from those who call themselves our leaders. We’re told the network of far-flung interests is for our own security, but as Johnson and

others have shown, global military and political intervention makes enemies for the country, invites terrorism (“blowback”), and hence endangers Americans at home and abroad. How many examples do we need? September 11 should have been enough for even the dullest of observers. It’s time to end the scam: our alleged protectors are in fact the greatest threat to our liberty today. Even the U.S. government admits that the war in Iraq is creating terrorists.

The morally bankrupt administration has nothing left to do but beg for more time and engage in rank demagoguery. After the House passed the withdrawal deadline, Vice President Dick Cheney, who talks to Americans as though we are morons, said those who voted yes are “not supporting the troops. They’re undermining them.” Such posturing is the last refuge of a scoundrel.

Cheney would have us believe that the way to support the troops is to insert them into a brutal war far from home, bashing down doors, searching civilians, and even firing on them and killing them. In his Orwellian world “support” means not letting anyone say what everyone knows: that the troops have been put in the untenable position of an occupying army. They are not fighting for “our freedom”; they are doing the bidding of politicians bent on shoring up a crumbling empire.

They are not fighting for the Iraqis’ freedom either. Is anyone surprised that public-opinion polls show that Iraqis believe things have gotten worse for them since the fall of Saddam Hussein?

Once again, foreign intervention has given America a black eye. When will we learn?

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