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Yes to Recriminations against Iraq Policymakers **by Sheldon Richman**

If, as President Bush claims, Iraq is a sovereign country and its government represents the people, then why are American officials ordering the parliament to cancel its August vacation and insisting that the al-Maliki government meet certain “benchmarks”? Is it sovereign or not? By what authority does the U.S. government dictate to it?

Something just doesn’t add up here. The Bush administration is also building a dozen military bases in that country and a new embassy larger than the Vatican. These look like the acts of an empire.

Just as ominous is the fact that some critics of the war, particularly Democrats in Congress, say the reason we ought to exit Iraq is that the government and people aren’t worthy of U.S. intervention. We should get out, but that’s the wrong reason.

This is a bad sign because it is apparently the beginning of the effort to let the Bush administration off the hook. His defenders will insist that things would have gone swimmingly if only the Iraqi politicians had been more responsible. “What are we supposed to do when you have to deal with people like that?” the war party is already asking.

This defense must be nipped in the bud. The disaster that is Iraq is the fault of Bush and former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who stampeded the American people into war with tales of weapons of mass destruction, and the conservative intellectuals who pressed their case for an unprovoked imperial war so the United States could remake the Middle East. They unleashed the violence that takes place there now, having sent the military in without regard for the reaction a Western invasion and occupation would ignite. They are responsible for the deaths. As Randolph Bourne, a critic of U.S. entry into World War I, said, “Willing war means willing all the evils that are organically bound up with it.”

When the Vietnam war finally ended, “responsible leaders” said there should be no recriminations: The war was a mistake, they said, now let’s move on. That was wrong. The war was not a mistake. It was a crime that involved the murder — ultimately at the hands of the American warmakers — of two million Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans. The officials who were

responsible for launching that violence should have been subject to recriminations. At the very least, a full public inquiry should have been held so that the culprits could have been properly disgraced and their crimes made clear to everyone.

The same should happen with the Iraq war. The Democrats came into power this year promising to do something and what have they done? Not a blessed thing, because they are afraid that anything they do will be used against them in next year's elections. That is cowardice, pure and simple.

America's presence in Iraq will continue to keep that country in turmoil. Bush wants us to think he is fighting al-Qaeda, but there was no al-Qaeda in Iraq before the United States got there, and al-Qaeda-in-Iraq is not Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda. Once again, Bush is lying to the American people.

The United States must leave Iraq at once. That should be the first step in a full withdrawal from the Middle East, a region American presidents have treated as their own at least since the end of World War II. No one believes the United States is an honest broker there. Pious calls for peace from an U.S. president are a joke, when Americans weapons have wrought so much death and destruction there.

The people of the region will need to figure things out for themselves. Real peace and freedom cannot be imposed by bayonets and bombs, especially when wielded by a foreign occupier.

Let's leave the people of the Middle East alone and get our own house in order. No more foreign intervention. No more making enemies. We have much to do. Let's start — with recriminations for those in Washington who got us into this mess.

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