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## **The Perils of Nation-Building, Part 1**

**by Doug Bandow**

The United States easily conquered Iraq, but the war was only the beginning. Winning the peace is proving to be far more difficult. Destroying an unpopular, isolated dictatorship in a wreck of a country was one thing. Creating a liberal, multi-party, multi-ethnic democracy where one has never existed is quite another. Despite the positive tone that he has presented to the public, even President George W. Bush has been forced to acknowledge that America faces a “security issue in Iraq,” a “massive and long-term undertaking.”

Lest people grow discouraged, the administration has mounted a concerted PR campaign, mixing presidential speeches with congressional testimony and creation of an “Iraq Stabilization Group.” But bombings, shootings, and killings of Americans and Iraqis alike continue, despite claimed improvement in the provision of services and security. The United States is virtually alone in contributing large numbers of troops to garrison Iraq and large sums of money necessary to rebuild it. Polls find that a plurality of Iraqis have a negative view of America and a majority believe that Western-style democracy will not work.

Officially, the Pentagon proclaims that it will stay in Iraq “as long as necessary” and leave “as soon as possible.” Superficially, that sounds like a sensible course. But real success for the administration seems ever more distant. Washington’s only hope is to set modest goals and a firm departure date from Iraq.

Yet unexpected opposition to the U.S. occupation has forced the Pentagon to delay withdrawing American forces. More than 115 deaths and 1,000 woundings of U.S. military personnel occurred in the first six months after President Bush declared the war over. Hostile Iraqis apparently took his challenge to “bring ’em on” seriously: they have launched multiple suicide bombings, routinely shot up military patrols, downed several helicopters, threatened aircraft flying into Baghdad airport, and even disabled the supposedly unstoppable M-1 Abrams tank.

Forget dropping to 30,000 soldiers by the end of 2003, as promised by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Instead, analysts are talking about the necessity of pushing the total up from

160,000 to 200,000 or even 300,000. And few outside powers have proved willing to put their soldiers at risk to bail out an administration that was so adamant in going to war when doing so seemed easy. Indeed, what other government would want to subject its citizens to Washington's counterproductive leadership? Iraq is going to stay America's problem.

Yet just maintaining the current force will stretch the U.S. military. In peacetime the army has traditionally aimed to deploy only a third of its units at any one time. Author Frederick Kagan argues that with a force of ten divisions and several enhanced war-fighting brigades, the army could support an Iraqi deployment of only three and two-thirds divisions, compared with the more than equivalent of five now on station. The problem is made more acute by the fact that Iraq is not America's only foreign commitment. Of the army's 495,000 soldiers, 370,000 are deployed overseas. Although tours in countries such as Britain and Germany include families, few people want to join the army if doing so means rarely seeing home.

Now much of a soldier's time overseas might be spent in war zones. Of 33 active-duty combat brigades, 21 have been deployed: 16 to Iraq, 2 each to Afghanistan and South Korea, and 1 to the Balkans. Given other commitments and refitting, only 3 brigades currently are available as replacement forces for Iraq.

"Every possible unit worldwide is being considered for possible rotations in different mixes and matches," explained one Defense Department official to the *Washington Post*. But that's just a stopgap, and not a particularly realistic one at that. Moreover, it is particularly rough on the troops themselves.

A Council on Foreign Relations panel chaired by former Defense secretary James Schlesinger warned that "even the lowest suggested requirements of 75,000 troops" in the occupation force would mean "that every infantryman in the U.S. Army spends 6 months in Iraq out of every 18 to 24." Army officials privately acknowledge that up to a quarter of soldiers might have to serve back-to-back overseas tours. Increase the Iraqi troop requirement and toss in a covey of new commitments — Philippines, Liberia, et cetera — and U.S. servicemen and servicewomen won't see America again until they retire.

### **Rotational strain**

The unexpected occupation burden has forced the Pentagon to announce that tours in Iraq will be for one year, the same as in Vietnam and Korea and double the normal tour for "peacekeeping" missions. "We've done it before, and we can do it again," said Gen. John Abizaid, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq. We can in the short term.

But "either we find a fix to rotate those troops out and to keep the families content ... or we're going to suffer what I anticipate is a downturn in retention," warns military analyst Robert Maginnis.

Relying more on the reserves is another poor option. The Reserves and National Guard number 1.2 million, but about 210,000 were on active duty (down from 223,000 at the war's peak) in the fall of 2003. There are only 550,000 total in the Army Reserve or Army National Guard, however. Some already have served for more than a year. Frequent deployments are even more disruptive for reservists, who must leave their jobs as well as families and often face a ruinous loss in income.

That has led to political pressure to limit future call-ups: Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) has proposed limiting deployments to one for six months in any year. Reservists, too, are less likely to sign up and stay in if they face frequent and lengthy stints abroad in a war zone. Michael Doubler, author of *Civilian in Peace, Soldier in War: The Army National Guard*, believes recruiting and retention are likely to suffer. Not uncommon are army trucks in Iraq festooned with the sign "One Weekend a Month My Ass." As of September Army National Guard recruitments were well below Pentagon objectives.

The Marine Corps also could be drafted into occupation duty. But it is a small force of 175,000, designed to respond to unexpected contingencies. Moreover, as of mid 2003 19 of 24 active-duty and 4 of 9 reserve battalions were deployed overseas. Many of them have since returned home, but immediate redeployment would be no less burdensome for the marines than for the army.

Despite the strain on the military, advocates of nation-building are advancing an expansive nation-building agenda. Argued *New York Times* columnist Nicholas D. Kristof,

To leave behind a stable Iraq, we must establish order, nurture a free press and independent police force, purge the civil service of Baath thugs, help Iraqis write a constitution and hold local and national elections. All that will take a year or more.

Actually, far more than a year, nearly everyone now acknowledges. But that has not diminished the belief that the United States must stay, no matter how long it takes. Argues Harlan Ullman, associated with the Center for Strategic & International Studies,

We are now committed. The United States cannot cut and run. We have no choice but to make the best of the situation.

Similarly, warns Fareed Zakaria of *Newsweek*, going home means "giving up." And of course George W. Bush, cosseted in the White House behind an ample Secret Service guard, says that anyone who believes "we will run from a challenge" is mistaken.

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