

Do What It Takes in Iraq

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice gave an important speech a couple of weeks ago, in which she called on the United States to make a “generational commitment” to bringing political and economic reform to the long-neglected Middle East—a commitment not unlike that which we made to rebuild Europe after the Second World War. It was a stirring speech, made all the more potent by the knowledge that it reflects the president’s own vision. President Bush recognizes that, as is so often the case, American ideals and American interests converge in such a project, that a more democratic Middle East will both improve the lives of long-suffering peoples and enhance America’s national security.

For all our admiration for this bold, long-term vision, however, there is reason to be worried about the execution of that policy in the first and probably most important test of our “generational commitment.” Make no mistake: The president’s vision will, in the coming months, either be launched successfully in Iraq, or it will die in Iraq. Indeed, there is more at stake in Iraq than even this vision of a better, safer Middle East. The future course of American foreign policy, American world leadership, and American security is at stake. Failure in Iraq would be a devastating blow to everything the United States hopes to accomplish, and must accomplish, in the decades ahead.

We believe the president and his top advisers understand the magnitude of the task. That is why it is so baffling that, up until now, the Bush administration has failed to commit resources to the rebuilding of Iraq commensurate with these very high stakes. Certainly, American efforts in Iraq since the end of the war have not been a failure. And considering what might have gone wrong—and which so many critics predicted would go wrong—the results have been in many ways admirable. Iraq has not descended into inter-religious and inter-ethnic violence. There is food and water. Hospitals are up and running. The Arab and Muslim worlds have not erupted in chaos or anger, as so many of our European friends confidently predicted.

But the absence of catastrophic failure is not, unfortunately, evidence of impending success. As any number of respected analysts visiting Iraq have reported, and as recent

horrific events have demonstrated, there is much to worry about. Basic security, both for Iraqis and for coalition and other international workers in Iraq, is lacking. Continuing power shortages throughout much of the country have damaged the reputation of the United States as a responsible occupying power and have led many Iraqis to question American intentions. Ongoing assassinations and sabotage of public utilities by pro-Saddam forces and, possibly, by terrorists entering the country from neighboring Syria and Iran threaten to destabilize the tenuous peace that has held in Iraq since the end of the war.

In short, while it is indeed possible that, with a little luck, the United States can muddle through to success in Iraq over the coming months, the danger is that the resources the administration is devoting to Iraq right now are insufficient, and the speed with which they are being deployed is insufficiently urgent. These failings, if not corrected soon, could over time lead to disaster. Three big issues stand out.

★ **WHERE ARE THE TROOPS?** It is painfully obvious that there are too few American troops operating in Iraq. Senior military officials privately suggest that we need two more divisions. The simple fact is, right now there are too few good guys chasing the bad guys—hence the continuing sabotage. There are too few forces to patrol the Syrian and Iranian borders to prevent the infiltration of international terrorists trying to open a new front against the United States in Iraq. There are too few forces to protect vital infrastructure and public buildings. And contrary to what some say, more troops don’t mean more casualties. More troops mean fewer casualties—both American and Iraqi.

The really bad news is that the Pentagon plans to draw down U.S. forces even further in coming months. Their hope is that U.S. forces will be replaced by new Iraqi forces and by an influx of allied troops from around the world. We fear this is wishful thinking. It seems unlikely that any Iraqi force capable of providing security will be in place by the spring. And as for the international community—never mind whether we could ever convince France and other countries to make a serious contribution. In truth, our European allies do not have that many troops to spare. And

consider the possibly unfortunate effects of turning over the security of Iraqis to a patchwork of ill-prepared forces from elsewhere in the world.

That's why calls from members of Congress to "internationalize" the force and give the U.N. a preeminent role are unhelpful, and really beside the point, at this critical juncture. Senator Biden is correct to say that "we have a hell of a team over there, but they don't have enough of anything." But he's wrong to suggest that a meaningful part of the solution would be "to internationalize" this. And when Rep. Mark Kirk says that "every international peacekeeper brought in is a chance to replace an American," he's raising false hopes among the American people. Such calls for "internationalization" also signal to Iraqi Baathists and Islamic radicals an inclination on the part of the United States to cut and run.

It's true that, unfortunately, we don't have many troops to spare, either: We should have begun rebuilding our mili-

tary two years ago. And it is true that increasing the size of our forces, both in Iraq and overall, is unattractive to administration officials. But this is the time to bite the bullet and pay the price. Next spring, if disaster looms, it will be harder. And it may be too late.

★ **WHERE IS THE MONEY?** The same goes for the financial resources the administration has sought for Iraqi reconstruction. It is simply unconscionable that debilitating power shortages persist in Iraq, turning Iraqi public opinion against the United States. This is one of those problems that can be solved with enough money. And yet the money has not been made available. This is just the most disturbing example of a general pattern. The Iraqi economy needs an infusion of assistance, to build up infrastructure, to improve the daily lives of the Iraqi people, to put a little money in Iraqi pockets so that pessimism can turn to optimism. There has also been a stunning shortage of democracy assistance, at a time when, according to surveys taken by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, Iraq is undergoing an explosion of political activity.

We understand the administration's fear of asking Congress for the necessary funds for Iraq. The price tag, which may be close to \$60 billion, will provide fodder for opportunistic Democratic presidential hopefuls who are already complaining that money spent in Iraq would be better spent in the United States. But, again, the time to bite the bullet is now, not six months from now when Iraq turns to crisis and the American campaign season is fully underway. If Rice and others are serious about making a "generational commitment" equivalent to that which followed the Second World War, then this is the necessary down payment.

★ **WHERE ARE THE PERSONNEL?** The American military is not alone in facing a shortage of people in Iraq. Everyone returning from Iraq comments on the astonishing lack of American civilians as well. Until recently, only a handful of State Department employees have been at work in Iraq. The State Department, we gather, has had a difficult time attracting volunteers to work in Iraq. This is understandable. But it is unacceptable. If the administration is serious about drawing an analogy with the early Cold War years, it should remember that the entire U.S. government oriented itself then to the new challenge. We need to do the same now. The administration must insist that the State Department pull its weight. Indeed, we need to deploy diplomats and civil servants, hire contract workers, and mobilize people and resources in an urgent and serious way. Business as usual is not acceptable. Getting the job done in Iraq is our highest priority, and our government needs to treat it as such.

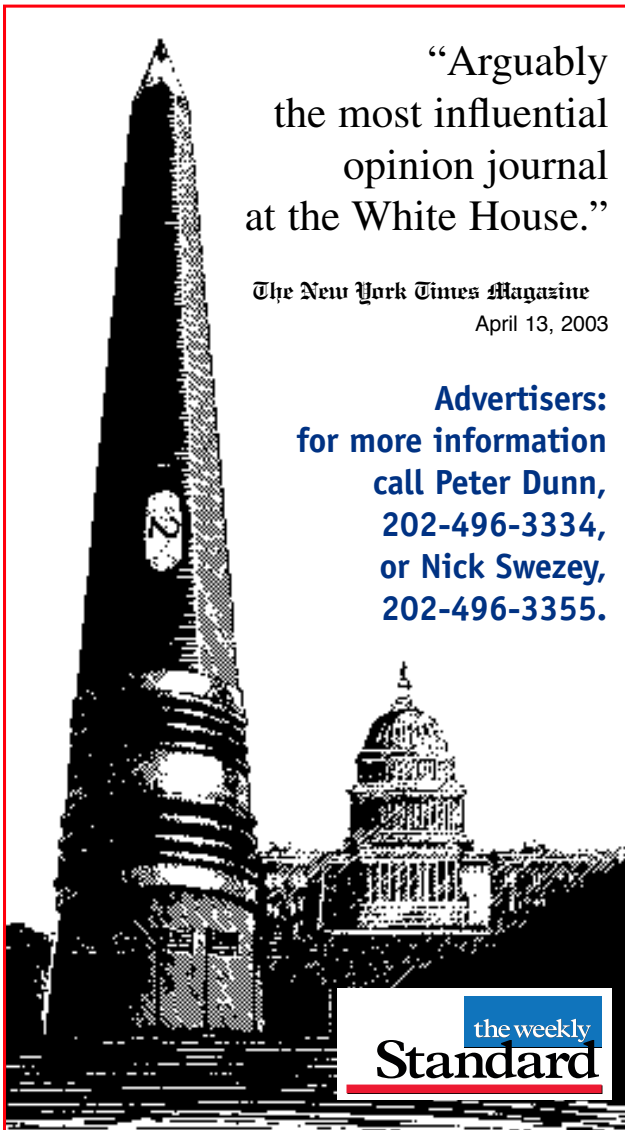
These are the core problems the Bush administration needs to address. Success in Iraq is within our reach. But there are grounds to fear that on the current trajectory, we won't get there. The president knows that failure in Iraq is intolerable. Now is the time to act decisively to prevent it.

—Robert Kagan and William Kristol

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