

By the way, has anyone heard from Wolfowitz?

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by Pat Buchanan

Is America's War Winding Up?

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Is America preparing to pull out of Iraq without victory? Are we ready to leave that war-ravaged land without any assurance a free, democratic, pro-Western Iraq will survive? Is President Bush willing to settle for less than we all thought?

So it would seem. For it is difficult to draw any other conclusion from the just-completed Rumsfeld mission.

Standing beside our defense secretary in Baghdad, Prime Minister Ibrahim al Jaafari called for the speedy withdrawal of U.S. forces. The top U.S. commander, Gen. George Casey, also standing beside Rumsfeld, said "fairly substantial" withdrawals of the 135,000 U.S. troops in Iraq could begin by spring.

This seems astonishing, when hawkish critics of Bush are saying we need more, not fewer U.S. troops, if we hope to win this war.

What is going on? "The struggle against the Iraqi insurgency has passed a crucial tipping point," writes UPI's senior news analyst Martin Sieff.

Casey's comment lends credence to a secret British defense memo that described U.S. officials as favoring a "relatively bold reduction in force numbers." The memo pointed to a drawdown of Allied forces from 170,000 today to 66,000 by next summer, a cut of over 60 percent.

Previously, the administration had denounced war critics who spoke of timetables, arguing that they signal the enemy to go to earth, build its strength and strike weakened U.S. forces during the pullout.

Now, America's top general is talking timetables.

Jaafari set two conditions for a rapid U.S. withdrawal: faster training of Iraq security forces and coordinated transfer of duties for defending the cities to the Iraq army. These conditions would seem

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easily met by the United States.

Among growing signs of American impatience with the situation in Iraq is Rumsfeld's tough talk to Baghdad to complete the writing of its constitution by Aug. 15. "We don't want any delays," he said. "Now's the time to get on with it." In October, Iraq is to vote on that constitution, and on December on a new government.

The reasons for America's impatience are understandable. First, the poll numbers are turning against the war, with half the American people now believing the United States will not win it.

Second, two years into a guerrilla war, the Iraqis, whose fathers and brothers fought Iran to a standstill in an eight-year bloodbath in the 1980s, still cannot cope with an insurgency of 20,000 to 30,000 enemy. Or not enough are willing to fight.

Third, while Gen. Casey says the level of enemy attacks "has not increased substantially over the past year," their lethality has increased, especially the suicide car-bombings.

"Insurgencies need to progress to survive," said Casey. But it is also true the guerrilla wins if he does not lose, and the Iraqi insurgents are not yet losing. And if 135,000 U.S. troops cannot, after killing and capturing tens of thousands, crush a guerrilla movement, how can the Iraqi security forces, heavily infiltrated, succeed where we failed?

Fourth, the new Iraqi constitution is reportedly not going to track the work of Madison and Hamilton, and women look like the big losers. If the new Iraq resembles Iran, Americans are unlikely to support having sons and daughters dying to defend such a regime, elected or not.

Then there is the budding Baghdad-Tehran axis. Neither Condi Rice nor Rumsfeld nor any U.S. official has been invited to visit the Grand Ayatollah Sistani. Yet, Iran's foreign minister was invited to visit that Shia pope, and Jaafari and eight Cabinet ministers paid a return visit to Iran. There, Jaafari apologized for the Iraq-Iran war and laid a wreath at the tomb of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who first branded us "the Great Satan."

U.S. forces in Iraq are thus today fighting in defense of a Shia-dominated regime that sees its future in close collaboration with an "axis-of-evil" nation Bush has declared a state sponsor of terror.

While Jaafari backed away from an earlier agreement to have Iran train Iraqi troops, we can begin to see the shape of things to come.

Sunni terrorists and foreign fighters have begun to target Shia clerics and mosques. And the Shia have begun to retaliate with counter-terror, portending a religious-civil war when U.S. troops depart. Kurds are

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demanding that their virtual independence be enshrined in the new constitution. Or they veto it.

Should civil war break out as Americans depart, Iran would move to fill the gap with weaponry and perhaps volunteers to assist their Shia brethren in keeping Iraq in friendly hands. A Sunni–Shia war in Iraq, with Iran aiding one side and Arab nations the other, becomes a real possibility.

No wonder the Pentagon sounds impatient to get out. By the way, has anyone heard from Wolfowitz?

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