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WHY BUSH IS WRONG ABOUT IRAQ

Criticisms of yesterday's Bush policy announcement regarding Iraq need to be explained so that the public can understand not just that he is wrong, but why he is wrong.

Because the administration misled the public so often and so severely in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, there is an obvious credibility problem now. We cannot accept at face value his assessment of the situation in Iraq, particularly since so many of his generals have publicly disagreed with it. But there is another aspect to the credibility of Bush's plan. It is the aspect of investments in Iraq by entities in the US and UK. We are told by the administration that we are sacrificing American lives and dollars to safeguard freedom. There may, however, be an unspoken monetary interest for which America is sacrificing. On February 24, 2004 a private sector development conference was held at which Ali Alawi, Iraq's trade minister at the time, made a pitch to coalition investors to open Iraq to foreign investment. At the very least, before escalating the war, the Bush and Blair administrations owe the American and British people a full discussion and disclosure of what economic interests stand to lose should Iraq not turn out to be a "success." Given the record of the past six years, we deserve to know exactly for whom we are spending and dying.

The insistence of the administration to deal with the problems of Iraq through violence and more violence bespeaks a kind of "World Wrestling Federation" mentality. It is a mentality which has ignored the history of the region, a history of Western colonial domination which has fed the fires of terrorism. Every time we escalate the violence, we appear to the people of the region more as an occupying invader than the angel of democracy. The inability to understand and deal with this is a major and tragic flaw in Bush's policy.

But let us, for the sake of argument, accept the tactic of increasing our troop strength in Iraq. We would then have about 160,000 soldiers there. Iraq is a nation of over 20 million, and the Islamic peoples of the world number one billion. In sheer mathematical terms, our escalation could easily prompt the recruitment of more young Islamists to fight us, and in the numbers game, we could not possibly counteract what might lie in wait.

Then there are the repercussions of expanding our violence into Iran and Syria, clearly a part of Bush's policy talk. Again, instead of talking to other nations, the act of military aggression against them might in and of itself ignite a regional conflagration—whether or not our mission in Iraq is a "success."

Perhaps before the expenditure of additional blood and money, it would be appropriate to at least bring to the attention of the Iraqi people the possibility of reducing their domestic violence by creating three or perhaps four autonomous states: a Kurdish state, a Sunni state, a Shiite state, and perhaps the state of Baghdad, which itself might be divided as

Berlin was divided. By giving each of the warring factions of Iraq territories and self-determination, and by coming to an agreement on an equitable sharing of the oil revenue of Iraq, a true incentive both to stop internal warring and to oppose an external infiltration of Al Qaeda might emerge. Such a tactic at least deserves discussion before we try yet more violence.

Finally, the Bush plan again fails to draw upon the help of the world community both to stop terrorism and to build the economies in which terrorism grows. It maintains the US as the lone policeman, a role increasingly more difficult and unpopular.

Unfortunately, once additional troops are deployed to Iraq, it will be morally incumbent on Congress and the American people to support them. Congress can't take the role of Commander-in-Chief away from the President, and if he defies their will or the will of the American people, the only way Congress would have to thwart him would be to withhold financial support for the extra soldiers—a position which would make helpless pawns of the brave men and women who are fighting.

Ultimately, the only remedy for Bush's "cowboy foreign policy" is to replace him, and that will happen either by impeachment or the elections of 2008.