

War's End, New Year

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Just as the drawing of a year to a close provokes reflection, so too does the close of a war. The end of the Iraq War is an occasion for many of us to look back at the initial reasons for the conflict, as well as at its often questionable execution throughout. Perhaps most importantly, the lowering of the American flag in Baghdad signifies not only the end of an era, but the beginning of a new and unknown future for Iraq, the Middle East, and the United States.

The causes of the war are manifold, and those who would assign a single, monolithic motive for the U.S.'s actions (i.e. oil, blood-vengeance, imperialism, crusade, etc.) are probably not capable of much more complexity. However, these people can hardly be thought of as alone in their desire for tamable simplicity when President Bush chose the "fear" option of WMD's and mushroom clouds rather than explaining the complexity of the situation. Again, I must say: probably not capable of much more complexity. Among my favorite single-stroke reasons for going to war is the fact that the U.S., by way of the C.I.A., helped Saddam Hussein come to power in the first place, and is trying to clean up its mess. The great irony here is that the same people who point this out often simultaneously use it as the reason why there should have been NO intervention! I ask them: Does this not give us even greater responsibility to do something about it? In any case, waiting for the regime to implode, and for Iraq to disintegrate between the polar forces of Uday, Qusay, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran was not an option.

An analysis of the abysmal prosecution of the war would take volumes, and would simply have to include the word "piss-poor" on every other page. There is no other English phrase more apt to describe such failures as using a light truck (the HMMWV) as the primary armored car, necessitating so many add-on armor upgrades as to result in a top-heavy gypsy wagon which killed dozens of troops in rollover accidents. One thing is clear, though, from the execution of combat missions by U.S. troops: This was no war against Islam. A very few of my acquaintances (both Muslim and otherwise) feared that the war was religiously motivated. Startlingly, some of these folks *wished* it to be so! However, we only need to ask ourselves why the city of Fallujah still standing. Why did we give weeks' notice for the citizens to leave before making the sweep for insurgents? Why did we send Marines house-to-house, losing their limbs and lives in gut-spilling hand-to-hand combat, when we could have carpet bombed the town into rubble in a matter of minutes? The U.S. is a nuclear armed country with the capability to utterly destroy nations. Had this been a war against Islam, house-to-house clearing of homes, payments of cash to Iraqi families who lost loved ones due to collateral damage, and the jailing of U.S. soldiers for atrocities against Iraq's citizens would not have been the best way to proceed.

The mighty questions remains: Did we win? What future? Certainly the mass graves being emptied now, rather than filled, counts as some sort of victory. I remember ridiculing Bush when he said, "We are fighting that enemy in Iraq ... so that we do not meet him again on our own streets, in our

own cities.” I also remember eating my words as I watched the decimation of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the shifting of al-Qaeda’s strategy towards using U.S. citizens as “home-grown terrorists”. This is because we killed most of their willing martyrs when they came to fight us in Mesopotamia. Today’s Iraq is traumatized, but the apocalyptic sectarian war that the parties of god tried to unleash on its citizens was instead blunted against the bodies of U.S. soldiers. What remains is for the U.S. to stand by its new ally and not again abandon, as we had done in 1991, those Iraqis who wish for secular Democratic rule.