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New Orleans, Louisiana

IN IRAQ, YOU GOTTA KNOW THE TERRITORY!

I'll tell you how slow my weekend was. I actually sit down and read the Iraq Study Group Report, and all of its 79 recommendations. I learned that the situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating. No big surprise here. Lots of finger pointing and generalities, but where's the beef?

Will Rogers once asked: "How do you stop submarine warfare?" He suggested all you have to do is heat up the ocean and make it so hot that submarines can't operate. And when he was quizzed on just how you go about heating up the ocean, he replied: "Hey, I make policy, I don't implement it."

I found the report, both confusing and contradictory. You can do this or you can do that. There is a recommendation to cut back on the number of troops in Iraq now. But then a second recommendation calls for using a "surge" and increasing the number of troops.

The report doesn't conclude that the situation is going to get any better. General William Odom, once the top guy over there but now retired, said over two years ago that if we get out, it's going to be terrible. But he went on to say that if we stay, it's going to be even worse. So nothing new here. Odom by the way also said recently that the handling of Iraq could be the single biggest foreign-policy mistake in American history.

One of our failings, not mentioned in the report, is the fact that nobody knows how to communicate. Just last week, there were reports that over a thousand people are working at the US Embassy in Iraq. But only six can speak Arabic fluently. It reminds me of the Broadway musical, the Music Man. One of the songs concludes that, "You gotta know the territory." And if you can't even speak the language, how can you possibly know the territory?

As all this soul-searching dialogue continues, the same two questions keep coming to mind. First of all, who are the bad guys? The list within the Sunni, Shiite and Kurd militias seem to be fluid and the bad guys are apt to change almost weekly. So we apparently are trying to win the hearts and minds of various sects of the country by kicking down their doors and screaming at them in a language they don't understand. Any wonder why there is not more Iraqi support for their American liberators?

The second question. Is there really an Iraq? The Report barely addresses the fact that Iraq needs Iraqis. Right now, there doesn't seem to be citizens of the nation, but rather a mixture of tribes that in the past have known only despotic rule. Loyalties are to a tribe, not to their country. So how do you find commonality to forge a democracy? Tough job.

The conventional wisdom or "Group Think." is that if the US pulls out of Iraq, the whole Middle East blows up. But does Iran really want this whole mess dumped in their laps? "Hey, you just won southern Iraq." If civil war breaks out, because of divided loyalties, we will find Syria on one side and Iran on the other. The US has been hearing from states surrounding Iraq that "you can't leave, and we won't help." Well if we leave, violence will spread over to the surrounding states.

Maybe they need to have a civil war in Iraq. I know that sounds terrible; there will certainly be major violence. Right now, Iraq is imploding on the US and on our forces located there. If we leave, it probably explodes on its surrounding neighbors. So far, Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia have chosen to sit back and do nothing. If the US pulls out, then these same countries have to face the reality that it's now their mess.

The report keeps talking about how the Iraqi army needs better training. Insurgents are not trained, and they are beating up on us pretty good right now over there. We've supposedly been "training" the Iraqi army for four years. What better success will we really have 10 months from now? Doesn't it come down to the old adage: "where there's a will, there's a way?" It's not the way in Iraq today, it's the will. And it's just not there.

To the majority of factions throughout Iraq, democracy is the second choice. We are trying to impose it as a first choice, and there's just no will to do so.

The Iraqi Study Group Report may be a good beginning point to start a bipartisan dialogue. But the continuing deterioration in Iraq could well make many of the recommendations obsolete and unworkable. The problem is fluid, and what may well work today may be irrelevant next month.

There is no good solution, but only least distasteful options. We are there for either a matter of months, or for many years to come. If we don't walk away, are we willing to pay the enormous price in money and lives that surely will be demanded?

It will take much more than the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Report. Vietnam fundamentally reshaped our country in ways that reverberate even today. Iraq will do likewise, and we well could be stuck with this problem for years to come.

["War continues in Iraq. They're calling it Operation Iraqi Freedom. They were going to call it Operation Iraqi Liberation until they realized that spells 'OIL.'"](#)

~ Jay Leno

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

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