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Viet Not

The history of the Vietnam War teaches that to preserve American strength and prestige, we must begin withdrawing from Iraq now.

This past August, President George W. Bush stood at a lectern in a VFW hall in Kansas City, Missouri, and launched an attack on critics calling for an early withdrawal from Iraq. Invoking "the legacy of Vietnam," he rued the prospect that Congress would "pull the rug out from under" American soldiers "just as they are gaining momentum and changing the dynamic on the ground in Iraq." And even though many expert commentators, including Boston University professor and Vietnam veteran Andrew Bacevich, have roundly discredited it, the Vietnam analogy is not likely to fade away. Voicing the Bush Administration's stance last month in the *Washington Post*, former Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Rodman asserted as the "widely accepted narrative of the endgame in Vietnam" that "there was a much-improved balance of forces in Vietnam, reflected in the 1973 Paris agreement, and that Congress

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subsequently pulled the props out from under that balance of forces—dooming Indochina to a bloodbath." Rudolph Giuliani, the frontrunner for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination, draws the same comparison in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*. "The consequences" of withdrawal, he writes, "were dire, and not only in Vietnam: numerous deaths in places such as the killing fields of Cambodia, a newly energized and expansionist Soviet Union, and a weaker America. The consequences of abandoning Iraq would be worse."

Recalling the jingoistic post-Vietnam T-shirt blurb, "Good Soldiers Betrayed by Gutless Politicians," this view holds that the Vietnam War was lost at home and could have been won on the ground, and that such a victory would have ineluctably rendered the United States better able to meet the broader challenges of the Cold War. The ensuing lesson for the present day is that proceeding to military victory in the Iraq War will enable the United States to flatten the transnational Islamist terrorist threat, and that now is no time to cut and run. But the truth is that the bitter stab-in-the-back Vietnam narrative that fuels the Bush Administration's argument is grossly and demonstrably inaccurate. The decline of American prestige and leverage, and the destabilization of Southeast Asia occasioned by Vietnam, resulted not from withdrawing too soon but, rather, from withdrawing too late. If we are serious about salvaging our strategic position in the Middle East, then we need to be clear-eyed about what history teaches us about interventions gone wrong—especially the war in Vietnam.

The Analogy Game

The Vietnam comparison represents the culmination of a series of tendentious analogies waged by senior American officials to justify the continuing military presence in Iraq. General David Petraeus, commander of American forces in Iraq, repeatedly bruits about the British counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland as a successful model for the American enterprise in Iraq. But that model is easily invalidated: British troops in Northern Ireland peaked at 30,000, against active Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) volunteers numbering perhaps 500 (which yields a soldier-to-insurgent ratio of 60 to one); coalition forces in Iraq now stand at roughly 170,000, facing over 30,000 Sunni insurgents alone, for a ratio of less than five to one. And whereas Protestant "loyalist" terrorism in Northern Ireland was almost exclusively pro-British, broadly pro-state Iraqi Shia militias have targeted American troops as well as their Sunni enemies. Because the Northern Irish conflict was small and containable, claiming on average fewer than 40 British troops a year—P.J. O'Rourke once dubbed Northern Ireland "heck's half-acre"—it was relatively easy to manage politically over the course of 25 years. Obviously, Iraq is not.

Undaunted by subtlety, the U.S. command in Iraq has glommed onto other models, like the 1950s British suppression of the Chinese communist insurgency in Malaya and the defeat of the bloody Salvadoran insurgency in the 1980s. These too are readily distinguishable. In Malaya, the British did an artful job of managing political and economic incentives, but they faced only an ideological minority of an ethnic minority, most of whom did not actively oppose the British and the ethnic Malay majority; the British likewise enjoyed an overwhelmingly superior force ratio. In El Salvador, there was a viable central government steeped in Western political traditions to defend, a relatively small number of insurgents, no sectarian dimension, and an operational requirement of less than 100 American military advisers. This made a "market solution" involving heavy economic aid and incentives singularly appropriate. Furthermore, in Northern Ireland, Malaya, and El Salvador, those whom we generally regard as the good guys won. The British government and the pro-British Northern Irish majority tamed the IRA sufficiently to open it to a political deal; UK-backed Malays prevailed over Chinese communist insurgents; and a pro-Western government remained in place in El Salvador at the expense of Soviet-supported rebels. The fact that these stories ended so well may explain the appeal of these purported Iraq precedents.

The Vietnam War has a different and more insidious relationship to the American psyche, one all the more seductive and resonant today because it does in fact bear objective similarities to the Iraq War. Both were major, large-scale American engagements against unexpectedly tough adversaries. Over time, both were met by dwindling public support. But there are also obvious differences. The Vietnam War evolved from a guerrilla insurgency into a major conventional conflict, while the Iraq War has taken just the opposite course. And Vietnam's crowning characteristic is that the good guys *lost*. Indeed, the Vietnam War is often cast as the first American defeat. As such, it cries out for redemption of a cause betrayed. It is this last, highly emotive and nationalistic impulse, rather than the war's pedagogical utility, that the Bush Administration seeks most acutely to exploit in implicitly vowing "never again."

A fortuitous cakewalk in the first Gulf War and an unexpectedly precipitous victory in the Cold War shortly thereafter gave us the luxury of shaking off a national leeriness of military intervention—the "Vietnam syndrome"—without coming to terms with how the war was lost or understanding its strategic consequences. Contrary to the stab-in-the-back narrative, the diminution in American prestige and leverage occasioned by the loss of the Vietnam War were temporary and more than offset by its unburdening effects, and the wider regional violence that followed that loss—in particular, the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambo-

dia—primarily resulted not from the U.S. military's withdrawal but from its pre-withdrawal escalation. But the Bush Administration has willfully ignored these realities and used Vietnam to amp up fears of American disempowerment. This misreading (or non-reading) of history not only reopens old divides between hawks and doves, but portends disastrous policy choices.

The Real Vietnam

Before considering the actual defeat in Southeast Asia, it is important to consider what would have constituted a victory. Outright success would have seen the United States withdrawing from a durable, democratic South Vietnam governed by a friendly elite respected by its people, overseeing institutions capable of defending the country against both external attacks and internal insurgents. As Lyndon Johnson stated unambiguously in 1965, "Our objective is the independence of South Vietnam and its freedom from attack." In late 1966, however, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara felt compelled to take grim stock of American efforts up to that point: "This important war must be fought and won by the Vietnamese themselves. But the discouraging truth is that, as was the case in 1961 and 1963 and 1965, we have not found the catalyst for training and inspiring them into effective action."

As the war proceeded, it became even clearer that there were no plausible circumstances under which the United States might have won the Vietnam War on Johnson's original terms. In taking up a stiff counterinsurgency challenge in Vietnam, the United States made itself hostage to the effectiveness and commitment of the South Vietnamese government. Furthermore, it became obvious that in Vietnam—as in virtually all counterinsurgency situations—an agreement changing the political conditions that spawned the insurgency was indispensable to a sustainable peace on terms acceptable to Washington and Saigon. Unless that happened, military gains, no matter how audacious, could not be sustained. Yet throughout the U.S. involvement, the South Vietnamese government remained decadent, stagnant, and incorrigible. As historian George Herring has noted, "The United States found to its chagrin that as its commitment increased, its leverage diminished." While there were undeniable counterinsurgency successes in the early 1970s, Saigon was not up to consolidating them by winning the confidence of its citizenry.

Meanwhile, the United States lost public support for the war—not because the American people were pampered, spineless, and lacked tolerance for casualties, but because they were convinced that the American leaders had conducted the war so incompetently and dishonestly for so long that victory could no longer be retrieved. If this sounds familiar, it should: Americans today have essentially

the same attitude toward the Iraq War.

The unwinnability of the Vietnam War is not an assessment gleaned from hindsight; it was readily apparent by late 1967. Although Johnson's informal council of "wise men" were whipsawed by the need to cut America's losses and the impulse to decisively impose its will, McNamara was resolutely pessimistic about American prospects. In a November 1 memorandum to Johnson, he wrote prophetically: "As the months go by, there will be both increasing pressure for widening the war and continued loss of support for American participation in the struggle. There will be increasing calls for American withdrawal… There is, in my opinion, a very real question whether under these circumstances it will be possible to maintain our efforts in South Vietnam for the time necessary to complete our objectives there."

The United States government, however, morbidly delayed its exit from Vietnam on the pretext of a fruitless "Vietnamization" process begun under the first Nixon Administration. The period was marked by a fatally incoherent combination of factors: the slow and indecisive withdrawal of American troops, an unmotivated South Vietnamese military (despite an accelerated U.S.-sponsored buildup), and the aggravation of local and regional populations by the increasingly brutal application of U.S. military power. Rather than seriously attempting to induce the South Vietnamese to develop institutions sufficient to sustain the state, the United States kept pressing for a military solution, expanding the war to Cambodia and stepping up the air campaign against the North. Despite effective rural development programs that diminished the insurgency, in 1972 the United States was basically left with what it had at the start: a decadent government in Saigon. In fact, things were worse. Ten years on, the problem was compounded by instability fomented by the war. As noted, the U.S. invasion of Cambodia had hardened the communist Khmer Rouge's resistance against pro-U.S. Cambodian leader Lon Nol and lent momentum to Pol Pot's genocidal designs.

Even leaving aside historical differences between the conflicts, the Iraq-Vietnam analogy is largely a straw man.

Having spent its domestic political capital on Cambodia, the Nixon Administration had little choice in 1972 but to eke out the Paris Peace Accords, under which North Vietnam would observe a cease-fire following a U.S. military withdrawal. But by then Nixon, devoid of popular American support for further engagement in Vietnam, had to negotiate with Hanoi from weakness. The Paris accords required a wholesale American pullout, but they did not require the

North Vietnamese Army (NVA) to withdraw from South Vietnam. Its patience exhausted, Congress would not authorize funds to equip the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) with the hardware it would have needed to repel a major NVA offensive. The U.S. military guarantee to South Vietnam came to little more than Nixon's secret 1972 pledge to President Nguyen Van Thieu that the United States would retaliate militarily if North Vietnam violated the cease-fire—a pledge rendered empty by the 1973 congressional ban on all U.S. military activity in Southeast Asia and its meager 1974 appropriation ($700 million) for South Vietnam. By the end of 1973, Watergate had so damaged Nixon's standing with Congress that he was powerless to revive any congressional support for U.S. activities in Vietnam. When the decisive offensive came in 1975, the Ford Administration could muster only toothless diplomatic protests. North Vietnamese troops soon overran Saigon, and the South surrendered unconditionally to the North in April 1975 as American helicopters staged an unforgettably shambolic and tragic evacuation.

Even leaving aside historical differences between the conflicts, the Iraq-Vietnam analogy is largely a straw man. Most of those who oppose a continued major U.S. military presence in Iraq have not, thus far, proposed a 1975 vintage withdrawal that would leave the Iraqi government without recourse to U.S. diplomatic or military support to secure its position in the regional political environment or military assistance to prevent state implosion. Indeed, all serious proposals call for robust diplomacy to temper destabilizing external influences and a U.S. quick-reaction force deployed in the region to deter and contain any security crisis in Iraq. That could change, of course. As long as large numbers of U.S. troops remain deployed in Iraq, it is not at all difficult to foresee circumstances on the ground—say, a suicide attack on the order of the 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Beirut—that would push opposition to U.S. involvement past the tipping point for measured and prudent compromise. In that event, only wholesale withdrawal, with little consideration for residual help to Baghdad, might satisfy a majority of Americans and their elected representatives. If that happened, American power and influence in the region would dwindle precipitously.

When to Withdraw?

In other words, the question is not whether to withdraw or not, but rather when and how. And in that regard, Vietnam does in fact offer some important lessons for today. Leaving aside the question of whether the domino theory ever held water, it is arguable that the United States had little choice but to commit its troops and prestige to the South Vietnamese regime, lest it risk undermining the trust of collective security partners. At the same time, countering a nationalist

communist movement like Ho Chi Minh's in North Vietnam was always going to be difficult, as Hanoi enjoyed the support of a dedicated population, an army to match, and the substantial resources of the Soviet Union and China. This triad of assets gave North Vietnam staying power that the United States could never muster. Given that these factors were increasingly understood by the last years of the Johnson Administration, when was the best time to withdraw?

There were, in fact, countless opportunities. Historian Fredrik Logevall has argued persuasively that America's best move would have been to start a strategic withdrawal—that is, an orderly military disengagement that also involved residual political support for South Vietnam and regional stability—during what he calls the "Long 1964." This was the period between late 1963 and early 1965, when doubts about Vietnam's importance to U.S. and Western security, the ability of the Saigon government to do its part, and the U.S. military's counterinsurgency capabilities were rife among American decision makers. The fear of appearing weak, however, prevailed. "If we leave Vietnam with our tail between our legs," admonished General Maxwell Taylor, who was about to become U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, in a July 1964 memorandum, "the consequences of this defeat in the rest of Asia, Africa and Latin America would be disastrous."

Doubts about the viability of the war spurred U.S. peace initiatives from 1965 to 1967, but mutual rigidity as to South Vietnam's future status and continuing majority domestic support for the war deprived them of critical momentum. The next promising moment for a strategic withdrawal—and a more plausible "what if"—would have been in 1968 or 1969, shortly after North Vietnam's resolve had been vividly demonstrated by the Tet Offensive and as domestic U.S. support decisively began to erode. Suppose, for instance, the United States had opted for a true strategic withdrawal beginning soon after the Tet Offensive in 1968, whereby Washington had begun negotiations with Hanoi and opened the possibility of a phased withdrawal in exchange for an open-ended cease-fire. Indeed, Johnson, confronting the rising pessimism of key advisers, declared the United States open to negotiations in March 1968. But even though talks were convened in Paris, the commitment to a political solution was far too tentative to gather momentum. Moreover, Johnson's simultaneous announcement that he would not stand for reelection effectively put an end to the talks and gave way to military escalation.

Had the peace initiative been more robust, the American public might have supported it. In turn, the initiative could have strengthened South Vietnam's position while reducing casualties, which might then have afforded the White House the political capital necessary to extend a credible military guarantee to South Vietnam, as well as to convince Congress to channel the South Viet-

namese government the funds and equipment required to establish parity with the North. Saigon might then have been able to salvage a stalemate. Even if Saigon had then failed, America's status would not have suffered to the extent that it did in 1975. It was not the U.S. failure to win the Vietnam War that most derogated its prestige. Indeed, exiting Vietnam allowed the United States to refocus on Europe, consolidate détente, and devote closer attention to opening relations with China. Furthermore, the United States eventually came roaring back in the 1980s with Reagan's huge defense buildup, Star Wars, and rollback in Central America, Grenada, and Afghanistan. What lingered in the memories of its allies and adversaries, though, was its foolish, decade-long commitment to a losing strategy in Vietnam that foreclosed the possibility of an honorable draw or even a negotiated defeat.

The Bush Administration's insistence on a primarily military solution to the Iraq problem threatens perverse consequences comparable to the slow decay of American prestige and leverage that occurred in 1973–75. If indeed the war turns out to be unwinnable, the provisional assessment of the United States as a stubborn, ignorant giant will become entrenched in the thinking of allies and adversaries alike, rendering them less amenable to American influence. The only way Washington can short-circuit that development is by making a late-course correction in its Iraq strategy, under which it adopts a less militarized and more conciliatory approach that allows it to manage Gulf security matters in a measured, deliberate fashion, alongside other exigent security concerns in different parts of the world.

Vietnam Redux?

Of course, Iraq isn't Vietnam, and it is the differences between the two that make arguments for staying the course today so risible. The Vietnam intervention could be sold (for a while) as an integral part of the Cold War. Arguably it made sense as a means of reinforcing the trust of collective security partners, setting limits for the Soviets and the Chinese, and strengthening containment, given that the nuclear risks of fighting a proxy war in Eastern Europe were too great. But the Iraq War—despite the Bush Administration's best efforts—has not scanned as an essential element of the War on Terror, at least since it became clear Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction and no meaningful links to Al Qaeda.

Absent the original justification for the invasion, several arguments for staying put have emerged. Yet each is fundamentally flawed. The first revolves around assumptions about what would happen to Iraq if the United States left. There are certainly some legitimate concerns about regional containment: Iran, for example, does have strategic interests in extending its power into the Gulf via

Iraq. But the United States does not face a peer competitor with imperial ambitions in the Middle East, and its regional adversaries do not have a great-power patron comparable to the Soviet Union or China. Iran, in other words, is no Soviet Union. Furthermore, North Vietnam was, by and large, ethnically and religiously homogeneous, and its people were united behind its government, while the South Vietnamese were largely disillusioned by a decadent government and the ham-fisted U.S. strategy of attrition. Iraq is fiercely heterogeneous, both religiously and ethnically, and it is in the midst of a civil war between Sunnis and Shia. Beyond that, while the civil imperative in Vietnam was to maintain the status quo, in Iraq it is considerably more difficult: to complete regime change from autocracy to democracy.

Overall, these realities suggest that in the event of a U.S. withdrawal, outside powers—including Al Qaeda, Iran, and the United States—will lack the political or military means to comprehensively control events inside Iraq. Whereas communists readily took power in South Vietnam, jihadists will not take power in Iraq. Nevertheless, a forced withdrawal following abject U.S. military failure in Iraq, à la South Vietnam, would leave the Iraqi government bereft of strong American backing. While it is unclear what difference this would make to the outcome of the civil war, it is clear that a well-planned, orderly pullout would be more likely to result in congressional approval of financial and operational support for the Iraqi government that might preserve some American influence in Iraq.

Vietnam counsels not staying put but rather minimizing the U.S. military presence soon, while still promoting political progress.

Second, on the operational side, proponents of intervention, the surge, and a continuing military presence in Iraq—the Brookings Institution's Michael O'Hanlon and Kenneth Pollack, for example—argue that counterinsurgency is finally working. But relative operational success by the U.S. military is only a part of the overall question of political victory. In 1970–72, America's military strategy was finally working in Vietnam, too. Indeed, by 1970 the insurgency in South Vietnam was all but kaput. The Vietcong cadres had simply impaled themselves on superior American firepower during Tet. Hanoi understood this, and from Tet on, its war strategy was to build up and sustain North Vietnamese combat power in and around South Vietnam. The United States sought to disrupt and interdict Hanoi's efforts while building up the ARVN, but it never succeeded in building a South Vietnamese army that was up to the task of defending the country—at least in the absence of U.S. air power. This lesson alone is bad news

for the Bush Administration, given the chronic difficulty it is having in getting the Iraqi army up to standard.

There is also a deeper problem with the assertions of impending "success." The insurgency in South Vietnam stemmed from agrarian hardship and was partly remediable by U.S.-assisted land reform and modernization initiatives. The Iraqi insurgency, in contrast, was directly caused by the United States, whose swift U.S. decapitation campaign precipitated the sudden collapse of the state with no serious plan for establishing order in the absence of Saddam Hussein's strong if brutal national structures. Multiple insurgencies, justified by sectarian fear and fueled by opportunism, inexorably filled the power vacuum. The continuing American military presence stoked the violence. Since many, if not most, Iraqis see the United States as the source of their present grief, Washington is unlikely to gain sufficient credibility among Iraqis to win over the insurgents. In addition, with Afghanistan in need of close attention, the United States would not have the troops available to complete the job even if the Administration were inclined to allocate other resources to Iraq. And even if mainly soft power were required to make counterinsurgency more effective, the U.S. civilian effort in Iraq compares dismally with that mounted in Vietnam. As of January 2007, fewer than 200 U.S. civilian personnel were assigned to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams charged with rehabilitating an Iraqi population of 28 million. This contrasts with some 1,700 civilian (mainly USAID) employees assigned to the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program during the Vietnam War, covering a South Vietnamese population of 18 million. And even CORDS had mixed results at best in terms of "winning hearts and minds."

In other words, as long as U.S. troops remain in Iraq, American efforts are bound to have an inherently feckless one-step-forward-two-steps-back quality. To capitalize on any military advances that the surge has produced, the Iraqi military—not American forces—would have to consolidate the gains, and Iraqi politicians would have to strike courageous bargains. Neither Iraqi institution appears capable of doing its part, just as neither ARVN nor the Saigon government was able to do theirs during the Vietnam War. In citing strictly military successes of the surge—a degree of pacification in areas of intensified U.S. occupation, the apparent degradation of insurgents' and terrorists' operational capabilities—as indications of progress in Iraq, the Bush Administration thus commits the same error that the Johnson and Nixon administrations did with respect to Vietnam: emphasizing that we are winning on points while suppressing the likelihood that the resiliency of the insurgency, Iraqi military inadequacy, and Iraqi political dysfunction will eventually combine to inflict a knockout punch.

Given this structural feature of our involvement in Iraq, domestic U.S. popular support is unlikely to last. As Eric Larson and Bogdan Savych's RAND Corporation study has shown, the American public will tolerate a high number of casualties if it is convinced they are serving vital American interests in a cause that can be won in the foreseeable future and if it sees wall-to-wall agreement among Congress, the administration, and the punditocracy. When the stars align in this way, as they did during World War II—and, indeed, for much of the Vietnam era—Americans will accept large losses. But when the public regards the spilling of American blood as strategically unnecessary or even pointless, as it did in Somalia in 1993, it is understandably loath to accept casualties in abundance.

To be sure, U.S. fatalities in Vietnam dwarfed the fewer than 4,000 Americans killed so far in Iraq, and the rate of military losses in Vietnam was far higher than that in Iraq. But public intolerance is not attributable to any inherent, quantifiable squeamishness on the electorate's part. As with Vietnam, the factors most responsible for undermining the national will are the imperturbable and almost surreal incompetence and duplicity of America's war leaders. On account of these transgressions—in particular, the grudgingly conceded fact that the casus belli were at best contrived and at worst simply manufactured, and the extravagantly stupid failure to anticipate a robust insurgency—an open-ended commitment is politically out of the question. Indeed, support for the war was thoroughly gutted by 2006, when Democrats, propelled by intensifying opposition to the war, seized control of Congress.

The Message of Vietnam

Iraq is geostrategically more critical to American interests than Vietnam. The loss of Vietnam certainly depressed American status and morale, especially in light of the disgraceful way the war ended. But ultimately, Southeast Asia didn't matter all that much strategically and, as we now know, adding a unified Vietnam under the communist tally didn't actually increase the Soviet Union's global power. America's pullout from Vietnam led to a thorough regional disengagement that was ultimately liberating for the United States. The same cannot be said for Iraq, if only because it is in a place that matters very much to the rest of the world (and now, thanks to Amrica's rash intervention in 2003, to terrorists).

Thus, the United States cannot abandon or ostracize Iraq, as it did Vietnam. But contrary to Bush Administration shills and conservative pundits, this does not mean that *any form* of U.S. withdrawal from Iraq will have terrible and persistent consequences—namely, an all-out Sunni/Shia war; the emboldenment of Iran, Hezbollah, and Al Qaeda; and diminished energy security. Those consequences are much more likely to arise from a panicky exit springing from

continued American futility. Consequently, the Vietnam experience counsels not staying put but rather minimizing the U.S. military presence soon, while still promoting political progress in Iraq and regional stability. No cost-free solution exists; any "victory" would achieve far less than what was originally envisioned by the war's architects and strongest defenders. But a strategic withdrawal would constitute a mature response to what has become an obviously futile quest and to the American people's loss of trust and confidence in the way the war has been conducted.

The U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam over the course of 1973 to 1975 proved so divisive precisely because a fictional "who lost the war" story line was pushed by conservatives in an effort to mask the inept conduct of a war they had backed. This stratagem recalled that of German nationalists during the Weimar era, who cultivated the myth that the Ludendorff Offensive of spring 1918 had effectively won World War I, but that democratic German politicians—the so-called "November criminals," some of Hitler's favorite scapegoats—had discarded victory through craven capitulation. Such tendentious posturing should not cloud the fact that U.S. involvement in Vietnam ultimately exceeded what the public would tolerate. The decline of public support, coupled with U.S. indecision, led to a frenzied withdrawal behind a political fig leaf and a dearth of post-withdrawal support for any legitimate South Vietnamese government.

The same thing could happen with respect to Iraq. If we do not exercise strategic discretion and design a near-term military disengagement that incorporates residual U.S. support for Iraq, we are likely to be forced—by domestic opinion at least as much as facts on the ground in Iraq—into a Vietnam-esque withdrawal that leaves no room for such support for Iraq and diminished American standing throughout the world. That fate is the one we tempt by keeping troops in Iraq when their presence there cannot secure America's interests and only weakens its strategic position. At the end of the day, America's allies value, and its adversaries fear, not its persistence in a dubious policy that is unlikely to serve its own interests, but its preservation of viable strategic options. ◘